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MUSIC REVIEW | MATA FESTIVAL

The Mandate Is Maintained. Just the Details Are Different.



Photographs by Julien Jourdes for The New York Times

From left, Mark Dancigers on guitar, Brian Sacawa on soprano saxophone and Andy Laster on alto saxophone, performing Tuesday night at the MATA festival, held this year at the Brooklyn Lyceum in Park Slope.

By STEVE SMITH
Published: March 22, 2007

When the composers Lisa Bielawa and Eleanor Sandresky started the Music at the Anthology series of contemporary-music concerts under the guidance of Philip Glass in 1997, the name referred to its original home at the Anthology Film Archives in the East Village. The festival subsequently moved to a number of alternate Manhattan spaces; the name was contracted to MATA, but the mandate of providing exposure to emerging composers has continued.

MATA's current series — its ninth, which runs through Saturday night — finds the festival relocated yet again, this time to the Brooklyn Lyceum in Park Slope. This rough-hewn former public bath on bustling Fourth Avenue provided an ideally funky setting for MATA's experimental aesthetic. (Manhattanites wary of trekking to points unknown may be reassured to know that the M and R subway lines emerge at the Lyceum's front door.)

Other details have changed as well. Ms. Sandresky is gone, and Ms. Bielawa will leave at the end of this season. The composer James Matheson, who was named the executive director last year, will have the task of guiding future developments. Helping to wrangle the present series is the guest curator Christopher McIntyre, a trombonist, composer and former curator of the Kitchen House Blend ensemble at the Kitchen in Chelsea.

After a children's program on Sunday afternoon the festival opened on Tuesday night with a program largely devoted to solo performers. Several pieces indicated that rock music is no longer a matter of casual influence but a formative foundation for some of these young composers.

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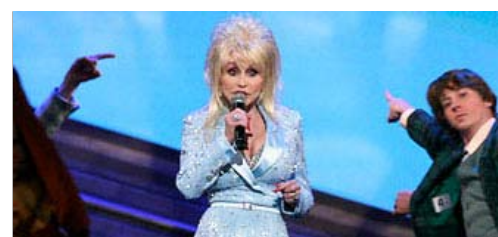
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The guitarist Mark Dancigers presented three of his “Electric Guitar Études,” in which the finger-tapping techniques and digital effects of heavy metal were codified and structured into attractive miniatures. In Bruno Ruviano’s “Instantânea” the sound of Jenny Lin’s piano was altered by a laptop computer into percussive crackles, bubbles and radiant sighs. Alexandra Gardner’s “Tourmaline” surrounded the saxophonist Brian Sacawa’s graceful lines and flutters with bustling electronic counterpoint and ghostly echoes.

Some composers were content to grapple with more conventional implements. The cellist Eric Jacobsen provided a compelling focus to Vincent Ho’s “Stigmata,” spinning its microtonal smears, glassy hisses and throaty growls into a ruminative strand. The pianist Simon Docking mastered six of Daniel Koontz’s “12 Improvements for Piano,” a series of treacherous, headlong tumbles and a charmingly nostalgic waltz.

Two concluding ensemble pieces also featured prominent soloists. Ms. Bielawa croaked and stammered her way into a fragmentary melody in Melissa Mazzoli’s “Shy Girl Shouting Music,” encouraged by Ms. Lin, Mr. Dancigers and the bassist Bradley Kemp. In Ryan Brown’s “our friend adam” those instrumentalists were joined by the saxophonist Andy Laster, who blew conversational lines over their stuttering rhythms.

The MATA Festival continues through Saturday at the Brooklyn Lyceum, 227 Fourth Avenue, Park Slope; (212) 563-5124 or www.matafestival.org.

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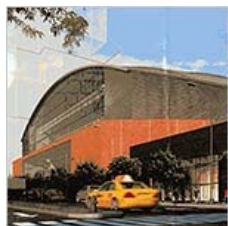
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