

Review

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CONTEMPORARY MUSIC REVIEW

Contrasting Modes

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Cindy Cox



By Jules Langert

Two pieces, though temperamentally far apart, were particularly engrossing on Earplay's Monday evening concert. Andrew Imbrie's *To a Traveler* (1971) for violin, clarinet, and piano is a memorial tribute to music patron Norman Fromm. It radiates a sense of clarity and balance, its thoughtful lyrical flow seeming to rise effortlessly from the long, supple melodic lines for clarinet and violin that begin the piece. Later, an extended three-way dialogue adds breadth and motion, the final clarinet solo rounding things off with a variation of its opening melody. Imbrie keeps the texture fresh and inventive throughout, as the music unfolds with an unaffected naturalness and sensitivity that never flags or loses its way. Though the oldest piece on the program, there was nothing at all dated about it in this fine performance by Terrie Baune, Peter Josheff, and Karen Rosenak.

If Imbrie's piece was Apollonian in outlook, its Dionysian counterpart was Canadian composer Vincent Chee-Yung Ho's *Stigmata* (2004) for solo cello, this year's winner of Earplay's annual Donald Aird Memorial Composition Prize. Ranging widely

Andrew Imbrie



Linda Bouchard



across a landscape of feverish mood swings — alternately brooding and eruptive — this piece maintained its impassioned rhetoric with the aid of slides, pitch bending, harmonics, and fierce bowing attacks. In cellist Thalia Moore's highly charged, expressive rendition, *Stigmata* made a strong impression — from its climactic outcries to the subdued, prayerful meditation that ends the work.

Pourtade (1983) for viola and percussion, by Canadian-born Linda Bouchard, is a series of brief, engaging movements designed according to a flexibly open-ended plan allowing the players to reconfigure the music in numerous ways. For this performance, Ellen Ruth Rose and Chris Froh selected five of the score's nine movements and repeated two of them. The lithe, playful interaction of sounds, rhythms, and timbres lends this attractive work an airy, dance-like vitality and a refreshing gestural spontaneity.

A bit weak

The program opened with Argentine-born Gustavo Moretto's *Silenciosamente* (1990) for clarinet, violin, and piano. Here, the composer's coupling of poised, expectant episodes with more urgent, sweeping passages became less effective as the work progressed. Moretto might have developed his material more richly or supplied some major contrast to enhance the music's otherwise repetitive momentum. Though there was much to admire in its elegant ensemble writing and imaginative interplay of effects, the piece seemed less than completely

realized overall.

The final work, Cindy Cox's *Axis Mundi* (2005) for flute, bass clarinet, violin, cello, piano, and percussion, was conducted by Mary Chun. This piece, an Earplay commission, was a colorful kaleidoscope of sound, its resonance boosted by electronic amplification. Frequent ostinatos and other recurring patterns often led by the piano, along with a lavish use of drums and gongs, gave it a quasi-ritualistic flavor, perhaps evoking the connection between starry constellations and indigenous belief systems to which the composer refers in her program notes. Lively and extroverted, though with a somewhat perfunctory ending in this performance, it filled the presumed need for a rousing finale after an evening of mostly inward and reflective musical expressions.

(Jules Langert is a composer and teacher who resides in the East Bay.)

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