



David Hertzberg, *YCA Composer in Residence*

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Joining the Conversation

The Composers Concert, with David Hertzberg and Other Young Masters

-Anthony Tommasini | *The New York Times* | February 18, 2015

All composers are influenced by, and even steal from, admired predecessors. This is a proven and honorable creative practice. The challenge is to fold such influences into your own musical voice.

This issue arose on Tuesday at Merkin Concert Hall during an inspiring program of recent works at the annual Composers Concert presented by Young Concert Artists. The outstanding performers included veteran guest artists and winners of Young Concert Artists competitions.

The evening opened with the New York premiere of Benjamin C. S. Boyle's "Sonata-Cantilena" for flute and piano. Mr. Boyle, 35, writes that his piece "celebrates the influences" of Barber and Poulenc. In this four-movement work, you recognize the French Neo-Classical elegance of Poulenc's style and harmonically bittersweet hints of Barber. The sonata is skillfully written and sincere. Still, the music is permeated with Poulenc and after a while becomes predictable. It was played vividly, however, by the impressive flutist Mimi Stillman and the fine pianist Charles Abramovic.

The next piece was a premiere: David Hertzberg's "Orgie-Céleste" for clarinet, violin and piano. In this riveting work, Mr. Hertzberg, 24, demonstrates that a gifted young composer can be inspired by masters and still speak with a vibrantly personal style.

The music abounds in echoes of composers Mr. Hertzberg seems to have had in his ear, especially Messiaen, Schoenberg and Morton Feldman. Yet the sound and dogged exploration of the work's ideas come across as utterly original. It opens with an episode in which the piano plays restless runs with hints of bird calls. The violin is consumed with cosmic harmonics, while the clarinet fixates on haunting two-note figures. The music goes through bursts of wildness, yet never loses its mystical aura. The eminent pianist Ursula Oppens, joined by the violinist Paul Huang and the clarinetist Narek Arutyunian, who were both featured in the Young Concert Artists gala concerto concert last year, gave an exhilarating performance.

There were also three short works by the composer and violist Kenji Bunch. First, Mr. Bunch and the pianist Monica Ohuchi (who are married) played a quizzical duo, "I Dream in Evergreen." Then Ms. Ohuchi brought her commanding pianism to Mr. Bunch's eruptive Étude No. 4 for piano. Finally, Mr. Bunch played a solo viola piece, "Étouffé," with the instrument unconventionally tuned to evoke Cajun music – wails, sliding double stops, dance riffs and drones.

The program ended with the New York premiere of "Summer Night Music," for piano quartet, by another accomplished young composer, Chris Rogerson. In this episodic piece in four movements, I heard the influence of Fauré, Copland, Ligeti and Sondheim. Yet, from its captivating opening – with the piano playing rustling runs, the violin and viola trading searching phrases and the cello repeating a calming riff – the music seemed the manifestation of a confident new musical voice. The performance by the renowned artists of Opus One (the violinist Ida Kavafian, the violist Steven Tenenbom, the cellist Peter Wiley and the pianist Anne-Marie McDermott) was superb.