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David Hertzberg, *composer*



PREMIERE IN MASON BATES' SERIES AT KENNEDY CENTER

Review: 'Mason Bates' KC Jukebox: Ravishment' at The Kennedy Center

By Ana Morgenstern | *DC Metro Theater Arts* | January 31, 2017

Virginia's own Mason Bates is the current composer-in-residence at the Kennedy Center and now playing the second season of his collaborative *KC Jukebox* series. The series presents out-of-the-box compositions in a different setting than the traditional Concert Hall would provide. The layout for the performances is quite different, in a flexible space at the Kennedy Center Atrium with lounge seating, high tops and bar tables; it feels like you are in the middle of a cool club straight out of a Woody Allen movie.

Last night, the latest installment of the series was titled *Ravishment*, after *the Second Quartet* by John Adams, conducted by Fawzi Haimor. It included other pieces by living composers, starting with a haunting *The Night Mare* by Christopher Cerrone. The composer appeared on screen via a pre-recorded video in black and white, explaining that magical realist Jorge Luis Borges was one of the sources of inspiration for this dream-like composition. Cerrone is interested in the phenomenon that occurs as we sleep and the disjointed imagery that is random is treated like a narrative in our minds. To that end, his piece was one of the most experimental of the night, including not only classical instruments but also a DJ in the mix.

The next couple of pieces were by Lisa Bielawa, a composer and vocalist who takes inspiration from literary sources and everyday life. In this case, the first piece, *Ravishment*, was loosely inspired by the poet Percy Shelley and his infatuation with an unknown woman, which Bielawa humorously called a little "stalkerish." The second piece, *Drama/Self Pity* was inspired by Bielawa's own eavesdropping in public transportation settings and the tendency she observed of people going the extra mile in their dramatic assessments of their own lives or circumstances in public spaces. This was definitely a fun and entertaining take, one that brings back perspective on the perceived versus actual difficulties in daily lives.

The next piece in the program was a short but wonderfully beautiful piece by Los Angeles-based composer David Hertzberg titled *Ellébore*, composed for a sextet. Hertzberg also came to us in black and white video format to explain his inspiration for the piece, which was a blooming flower in the winter. Indeed, this was a delicate piece that was definitely edgy but kept a balance through strings that reminded me of melting snow and the slow moving water accumulating in a field getting ready for spring.

Finally, Bates came out to close the program with a piece by John Adams. "*String Quartet* is one of those pieces that reminds me of Bach" Bates explained to the audience. It was a strong performance and one that reminds us why American minimalist composer Adams is one of the most influential contemporary composers. A varied and dynamic piece that deserves repeated listening. To hear it live was certainly a treat, and although the set-up included amplified sound through microphones instead of the beautiful acoustics of the Concert Hall, there was definitely great care into ensuring that sound shined, and it did.

The hundreds of people in the audience showed some love back to the stage, getting up in a standing ovation. Soon after, DJ Moose started spinning some tunes, but the majority of the audience left soon after the main performance was over. Some of the artists, along with Mason Bates came out and mingled in a setting that was intimate and engaging and would make non-traditional fans of classical music comfortable. I certainly appreciated the way contemporary composers are put front and center, breathing new life to a field that continues to evolve.