

DNA

Les Dernières Nouvelles D'Alsace

March 24, 2007

American Cousins

Meeting of contemporary music ensembles last week at the Cité de la Musique in Strasbourg; Accroche Note welcomed the quintet Open End, from the United States.

Within the framework of several days giving conservatory students the chance to explore the boundaries between “the composed and the improvised”, audiences here were offered two concerts in demonstration of the same. The occasion provided the opportunity to discover, in the company of Accroche Note, the remarkable musicians assembled by violinist-composer Andrew Waggoner, along with one of his works.

One heard thus, in addition to the compositional reference points, several examples of free improvisation, a passion shared by the players from both continents, and which has brought them together before, during a residency by Accroche Note in the United States. Their ways of improvising are markedly different. The pieces led by the clarinet of Armand Angster, determinedly conversational and confrontational, are strongly theatrical, particularly when joined by the voice of Françoise Kubler, while the members of Open End lean more toward the peaceful and consonant.

A Well-Tempered Modernism

For those not necessarily convinced by the aleatoric fragments forming the basis of the improvisations, the two concerts provided a Franco-American compositional panorama that made attendance at both well worth the effort. One rediscovered the dizzying virtuosity of Dusapin's *Il-Li-Ko*, both propelled and madrigalized by Françoise Kubler, and the gnawing *Trio Rombach* by the same composer, with more of a Klezmer inflection than ever. And the shimmering effervescence of *Dérive* (1984) of Boulez burst forth in all its freshness.

The partners from across the Atlantic chose, for their part, a program of well-tempered modernism. The *Sonata* for 'cello and piano with which Elliott Carter broke, in 1948, from the moorings of tradition was given with vibrant lyricism by Caroline Stinson and Molly Morkoski. Thanks to the violin and viola of Michael Jinsoo Lim and Melia Watras, the competent neo-classicism of the *Duo* by the eclectic Paul Chihara achieved a rare refinement. Andrew Waggoner joined his colleagues at the end in his quintet *Memory, Word, Mystery, Presence*, composed in 2005 in Strasbourg. A play of contrasts between harmonies both supercharged and still, between homophony and dense polyphony, all through an atonality that manages to be unaggressive, never sinking to demagoguery. The writing, beautifully clear, captures the ear throughout.

Christian Fruchart