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Hotel Elefant Brings Versatility To New Chamber Music

THE
DIMENNA
CENTER
FOR
CLASSICAL MUSIC

Last October, I CARE IF YOU LISTEN featured a video of the freshly deployed new music ensemble [Hotel Elefant](#) as they were preparing a work of composer Michael Gordon for their upcoming concert titled *Dia De Los Muertos*. Their Concert II was to focus on the theme "remembrance," featuring new works

by notable young composers as well as two compositions by Gordon. Unfortunately, Hurricane Sandy prevented concert from occurring on its originally planned date. Undaunted, Hotel Elefant eventually presented concert on Saturday, January 12, 2013.



Contemporary music ensemble Hotel Elefant (photo credit: hotelelfant.org)

The performance took place in a familiar venue for Hotel Elefant, The DiMenna Center for Classical Music. On first encounter, the room appeared to be more suitable for rehearsal than performance. But for this occasion the space proved to be an intimate and capable room for both the ensemble and audience, as it helped clearly bring together acoustic and electronic elements which were displayed in many of the works that night.

The concert opened with new music by young composers Angélica Negrón and Michelle Lou. Both notably accomplished for their young age, they brought meaningful contributions to the program. First was *Drawings for Meyoko* by Negrón, a piece was written for a small ensemble of flute, viola, and harp with electronics. At times it faintly resembled a Debussy-meets-Sufjan-Stevens-esque quality, as the music charted through a magnificent dreamscape. The three players from Hotel Elefant performed with playful dialogue between electronic and acoustic forces of the room using both recorded and live amplified sounds to fill out the timbre of the ensemble. Negrón's score calls for the players to begin and end the work by blending their own voices with the crumpling of plastic bags, making for a blissful and organic atmosphere.

Following that was *paralipomena* (Greek for "things omitted from a text") from Michelle Lou, a 2012 Finale National Contest finalist. Lou, also a bassist in Hotel Elefant, wrote the work as a companion piece for Luigi Dallapiccola's *Piccola musica notturna*. Originally commissioned by San Francisco Contemporary Music Players and using the same instrumentation as Dallapiccola, Lou's work reflected on the dark imagery of poet Antonio Machado, filling in Dallapiccola's "omissions" with extended techniques and long timbral explorations. The ensemble played the work precisely under the baton of Meg Zervoulis, but it felt as if it were missing something without being performed in conjunction with Dallapiccola's work.

All three composers on the program were in attendance at the concert. Sandwiched between an intermission and a two of his works was a brief interview session with Michael Gordon. Gordon gave the audience some insight into his composition process, including notes on the kind of diet it takes to compose his more "epic" pieces (brown rice for the longer ones and candy bars for the shorter ones).



Composer Michael Gordon (photo credit: © Peter Serling 2010)

Both of Gordon's works, *for Madeline* and *The Sad Park*, were wise choices for this program. Intimate and reflective, yet filled with energy and expansion. Gordon wrote *for Madeline* as a remembrance of his mother. It blends a small ensemble against a distorted electric guitar using a slide. At times the guitar tended to drown out the rest of the ensemble with white noise, but when there was balance, the drones and beautiful timbre evoked a powerful meditative state.

The Sad Park was equally exhilarating. An amplified string quartet played this work, along with pre-recorded tapes of children explaining their own personal experiences of witnessing the horrific events of September 11, 2001. The tapes, recorded by their teacher at the time, were manipulated, distorted, and augmented across the four parts of the piece. Gordon dissects and focuses on the acoustic properties of the children's voices, which at times had musical qualities unto themselves.

Michael Gordon is a composer who may not be as widely known as he should be. His music is filled with the life and energy in a diversity of genres. Yet, it is hard to pin down his style. With credentials that include being a founding member of Bang On A Can, Gordon has established a strong and unique voice within contemporary chamber music. Likewise, Hotel Elefant seems to be carving out their own niche, combining style, versatility, and quality of performance. They are well on their way to becoming a resounding force in the new music world.

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