

## No Exit in “Music, Mind, Mirth, and Mayhem,” music influenced by Erik Satie, at Spaces (April 8)

by Mike Telin



For the most recent installment of No Exit’s year-long celebration of Dadaist composer Erik Satie, the ensemble commissioned seven composers to write new works representing their own take on Satie and how his music has shaped their own musical universe. On Friday, April 8 in the acoustically pleasing SPACES gallery, No Exit presented the second of three performances featuring the new compositions. The Satie-inspired musical sandwich also included works by Heinz Holliger, Georges Delerue, and Buck McDaniel.

The program, titled *Music, Mind, Mirth, and Mayhem*, opened with the premiere of *Six Pièces à la Satie*. Although each work lasted no longer than three and a half minutes, pianist Nicholas Underhill’s astute ordering of the six miniatures created the trajectory of a single unified composition.

Geoffrey Burluson’s melodic *Lettres Dansantes: Hommage à E. Satie* is an attractive work with hints of jazz sprinkled in. Arpeggios from the top to the bottom of the keyboard dominated Timothy Beyer’s *Forests: real and imagined*, until the piece ended with a nod to Satie’s *Gnossienne No. 3*. James Praznik highlighted Satie’s penchant for repetition in his *Spiritualités Simultané*. Robert Honstein only makes use of the “white” keys in his *Chant Extatique*, playing on Satie’s assertion that he only ate white food. David Rakowski’s *Gnöpélledie* is an inventive three-minute set of variations, with a hint of ragtime. Kevin Eppich’s impressionistic *Pensées Têtuées* brought the set to a fitting conclusion with its cadenza-like ending. Nicholas Underhill, as always, played with sensitivity and technical agility.

While the 1963 performance of Erik Satie’s *Vexations* organized by John Cage lasted over 18 hours, James Praznik has creatively woven the central theme from Satie’s work into his own engaging 10-minute realization of Satie’s performance directions. During

the five short movements marked “ou il est question de pardon musique spectrale;” “pause — Très Lent;” “pour le pauvre minimalisme européen;” “pause — Assez vif;” and “A propos de Satie et Boulez,” Praznik provides the players with thematic material that is to be used as a point of departure for improvisation. While there were many great solos, trumpeter Scott McKee’s and bass clarinetist Gunnar Owen Hirthe’s were standouts. Fittingly, Praznik ends his *Vexations?* with a reference to Satie’s *Gymnopédies*.

Three works in diverse musical styles separated the two Satie tributes.

Heinz Holliger’s *Duo for Violin and Cello* is full of inventive musical shifts between free tonality and lush Western harmonic progressions that create an intriguing sound palette. Written in two sections — the first defined by sustained lyrical passages, the second a swift articulated perpetual motion — the work is sonically engaging. Violinist Cara Tweed and cellist Nicholas Diodore performed it brilliantly.

Introducing his new work, composer Buck McDaniel said that *Ride* is not a car ride but rather an abstract ride. A fast car ride or not, the 6- minute-plus work is full of excitement: minimalist rhythms play off of each other, while lyrical passages float above. A slower, syncopated middle section lets you catch your breath before the pedal hits the metal once again. Underhill, Tweed, and Diodore, who were joined by flutist Linda White and percussionist Luke Rinderknecht, gave *Ride*’s premiere a compelling performance.

Known more for his 351 film scores than his chamber music, French composer Georges Delerue’s *Diptyque* for solo flute is full of color and creative rhythmic lines. The two movements, “Poco lento,” and “Allegro,” explore all that is good about the instrument. Sean Gabriel played the idiomatic work with flair: its technical passages were clean, its melodic lines well shaped.

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