

Review**No Exit at Spaces Gallery (March 24)**

By Mike Telin



Since its founding, the Cleveland-based new music ensemble, No Exit, has been presenting musically intelligent, thought-provoking concerts that often require the performers to venture out of their comfort zones, and challenge the audience to listen with open ears and minds.

No Exit's most recent program centers around the music of jazz legend Eric Dolphy, and is the group's most musically expansive and technically adventuresome to date. We heard the Saturday evening, March 24th performance at Spaces Gallery, and from beginning to end, No Exit hit the proverbial nail on the head in every way. The program brilliantly uses Dolphy's unique approach to creating music as a jumping off point. No Exit asked three composers, Greg D'Alessio, Bobby Selvaggio (left) and Andrew Rindfleisch, to arrange three Dolphy tunes. The evening also included the music of Byrnes, Drucker, Emerson and Saariaho.

In addition to No Exit members Cara Tweed, violin, Tom Bowling, viola, Nicholas Diodore, cello, and Nicholas Underhill, piano, No Exit was joined by guest collaborators Bobby Selvaggio, alto sax, Chris Baker, drums, and Scott McKee, trumpet, all of whom are well known jazz musicians in the Cleveland area.

I know this is where I'm supposed to say things like, "isn't it great! classical and jazz musicians played together" or "wow! classical musicians had to improvise" — and while both of these things did happen, this was not a gratuitous, "east meets west" attempt at crossover. Rather the ghost of Dolphy seemed to be in charge as his spirit guided the expanded No Exit New Music Ensemble through a program of inventive and expertly performed music that, like his own, deserves to be freed of categorization.

Andrew Rindfleisch's arrangement of Dolphy's *Hat and Beard* (1964) scored for violin, viola, cello, alto sax, trumpet and drums, is an interesting mix of jazz idioms including hints of free jazz. Alternating between metric patterns and tonal and non-tonal scales, Rindfleisch keeps Dolphy's tune intact, while augmenting it with interesting colors and textures, until it fades away with the final pizzicato from the cello.

Nicholas Underhill presented a polished performance of Garrett Byrnes's *Bagatelle for L.v.B.* (2011), an impish work that inventively incorporates Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* theme as well as other fragments from the composer's piano scores including an interrupting statement from the *Waldstein* sonata. Durcker's *Truth* (1959), arranged by Bobby Selvaggio and scored for alto sax and cello, is a beautiful and at times haunting work. The arrangement opens with focused pizzicatos in the cello followed by a soulful bowed section. A duet between cello and sax is followed by another pizzicato section until the sax rejoins for the final duet. Bobby Selvaggio and Nicholas Diodore were astute collaborators.

Ty Alan Emerson's *Tripartite* (2012), scored for violin, viola and cello, requires the performers to call on their communication skills as the piece is basically written as a series of directions— the “do this until that happens” approach. Written in three movements, aria, recitative and finale, Emerson has managed to create themed patterns that clearly sound like their titles. Cara Tweed, Tom Bowling, and Nicholas Diodore “negotiated” with one another throughout, never stepping on another's line and joining together at the appointed time. The piece is extremely engaging and it's fun to watch the eye contact and body language between the players as well.

Nicholas Diodore, who seemed to be getting the biggest workout of the evening, opened the second half of the program with a completely captivating performance of Kaija Saariaho's *Spins and Spells*. Bobby Selvaggio's arrangement of Dolphy's *Out There* (1960) is scored for violin, viola, cello and alto sax. Selvaggio described his arrangement as sort of a Bartok String Quartet with the sax filling in for the 2nd violin. Beginning slowly with thick harmonies, the piece gradually moves forward until Dolphy's theme emerges. The middle section incorporates free improvisation from all of the players, until the theme is once again performed in unison. Another beautiful arrangement and performance.

Greg D'Alessio's *Lunch* (2012) is written in three sections, and here the full ensemble was back. D'Alessio describes the first section as a recomposed mash-up of songs from Dolphy's recording *Out to Lunch*; the second as a half-composed, improvisatory section; and the third, just regular. That being said, *Lunch* is a great, upbeat piece. Although it gives everyone some moments to shine, Bobby Selvaggio and Scott McKee were outstanding soloists in the second section. A perfect ending to a great concert. Happily, the performance was very well attended and the enthusiastic audience gave No Exit a rousing ovation.

The concert will be repeated on Friday, March 30 at Heights Arts and on Sunday, April 1 at The Green Mill Jazz Club in Chicago.

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