

MONDAY, 28 MARCH 2022 IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA - USA

"Don't play what's there, play what's not there." –Miles Davis

Composer's Notebook: SoundNOW 2017 kicks off a big week for new music in Atlanta

by **Mark Gresham** | 6 APR 2017

This is a big week for new music in Atlanta. A lot of things have come together to make it so. The SoundNOW 2017 Festival – an umbrella moniker for a number of independently programmed contemporary music performances – began on Sunday and continues through this coming Sunday. SoundNOW is only in its second year, but making its presence known.

I was able, so far, to attend the first two of these concerts, and fortunate to have one of my own works performed on Monday evening, and also to attend Sunday afternoon's opening concert. Both were downtown at the 400-seat Kopleff Recital Hall at Georgia State University.



Olivia Kieffer performs excerpts from her "Texture of Activity."

Sunday's concert was presented and performed by Terminus Ensemble, which performs music by current or formerly Atlanta-based composers. Olivia Kieffer opened the program with seven excerpts from her "Texture of Activity" (2016) – 55 short minimalist pieces which were originally for toy pianos, but in this instance performed on the hall's concert grand piano. Kieffer would play four more selections from the book on Monday's concert, but on a pair of amplified toy pianos, one toy piano per hand as part of neophilia Ensemble's portion of that concert. On Sunday, though, she had a second piece on the program, "Hot Work," in a new transcription for alto sax and viola, performed by saxophonist Brandyn Taylor and violist Michael Brooks. Originally for bass clarinet and tenor sax, the combination of viola and alto sax worked surprisingly well – something worth consideration by other composers.

Brooks also gave an impressive performance of "Lattice I," a well-stenciled three-movement work for solo viola by Terminus co-artistic director Brent Milam, a composer with a background in physics and mathematics, which he readily applies to his compositions. Pianist Ipek Brooks (spouse of violist Michael) performed another work by Milam, "Quiet Spaces," the third of his "Five Movements Anachronique."

An Atlanta native who now lives in Greensboro, North Carolina, Lowell Gerard Fuchs was represented by a vocal piece, "The Voices in Maximilian's Head," inspired by a true story of a man, diagnosed with schizophrenia in his early twenties, and which ultimately consumes him. Percussionist Brandon Dodge played vibraphone and tuned tom-toms as a fully collaborative part to the musically astute voice of guest soprano Carolyn Balkovetz.

Sunday's concert concluded with a mellifluous "Trio" for flute, cello and marimba by Curtis Bryant. Brandon Dodge returned to the stage to play the marimba part of the three-movement work, joined by flutist Amy Caputo and cellist Erin Cassel Idnani.



Members of Terminus Ensemble perform Curtis Bryant's "Trio" for flute, cello and marimba.

The stage for Monday evening's concert was shared by neoPhonia ensemble and the Atlanta Chamber Players. The first half was presented by neoPhonia, and as it was partially funded by the GSU Center for Hellenic Studies it was not surprising to see works by living composers of Greek heritage on the program.

The concert opened with "Prosody," a solo flute work by Yiorgos Vassilandonakis, who is currently on the faculty of the College of Charleston in South Carolina. Performed by flutist Matthieu Clavé, like many post-WWII works for unaccompanied flute, "Prosody" made use of a handful of extended techniques.

Likewise drawn from contemporary Greek repertoire was "Two Songs" (92007) by Thessaloniki-based composer Sotiris Despotis, performed by soprano Kyriaki Ioakeimidou and cellist Daniel Green.

In addition to Kieffer's aforementioned toy piano pieces, the other work on neoPhonia's program segment was "She Sings, She Screams" for alto sax and fixed media electronic audio by another Greensboro-based composer, Mark Engebretson, performed by saxophonist Joshua Heaney.

After intermission came the Atlanta Chamber Players – in this instance, violinist Helen Hwaya Kim, clarinetists Ted Gurch and pianist/artistic director Elizabeth Pridgen.

Changing the order of the printed program, Helen Kim and Liz Pridgen opened with "Study: Music, Pink and Blue No. 2" by Alan Fletcher, written for violinist Robert McDuffie and himself as pianist, inspired by Georgia O'Keeffe painting "Music, Pink and Blue No. 2."

My own work was up next: "Genshi" for E-flat clarinet and violin, performed most splendidly by Helen Kim and Ted Gurch. They had premiered the piece in 2011 as part of the summer Sonic Palooza marathon, held in the Galleria in front of Symphony Hall at the Woodruff Arts Center. So I was thrilled to have them perform it in this concert as part of SoundNOW 2107.

The obvious reason for changing the printed order was so as to end the concert with Mark Buller's "Motion Studies," the completed chamber work that was one consequence of winning the 2016 Rapido! Composition Competition with what became the work's challenging final movement, "Regressive Variations." It was a thrilling performance, especially that final movement. This was the second time I've heard he completed "Motion Studies," the first time was upon its premiere last September. The Rapido! Win also won Buller a chance to write for the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. That work, "The Songs of Ophelia," will be premiered by Robert Spano and the ASO on this season's subscription series closer, June 1st and 3rd.


SoundNOW 2017 continues through April 9. Check out the [SoundNow 2017 event page](#) on Facebook. •

[Photos by mark Gresham.]



Atlanta Chamber Players perform Mark Buller's "Motion Studies."

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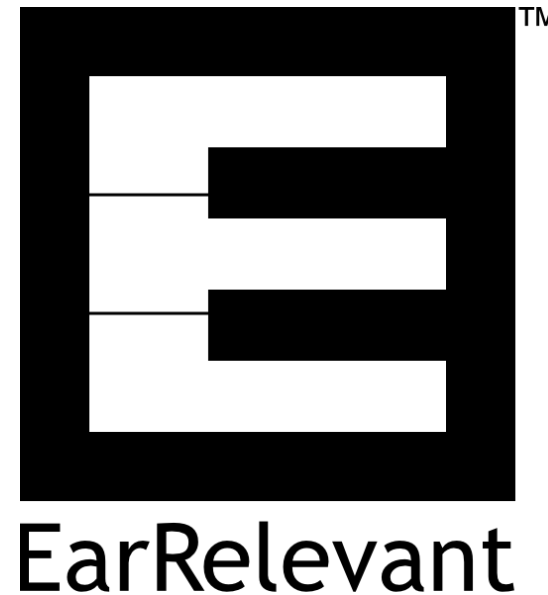


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April 2017

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						
« Mar				Apr »		

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