

Composers get the chance to unveil their new music

By Richard Buell
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE

Saturday night at Boston University, Alea III's rather involving idea was to have you hear the works by the finalists in their International Composition

Hear, Hear

Competition - rather than presenting you with a fait accompli - then invite you to stick around for the announcement of what the nine-member jury would decide. Unseemly wrangles having been avoided, this last took no longer than your average coffee break.

Once again, one had to notice that nowadays new music comes in a great many more flavors than a generation back. Giorgio Tedde's "Vocello" for tenor, cello, and electronics started out with what might have been a rude Velcro noise; out of this came a sustained hum that, for its part, might be sustained aircraft-engine hum. If the pitch stayed the same (and it did, relentlessly), the textures didn't. This was thanks not only to the exertions of cellist Giordano Antonelli's fingers and bowing arm, but of his right foot as well - a pedal was connected to a computer nearby, this manned by the watchful composer. A "sound" piece then, but one from which lyric contours definitely emerged. A variety of eastern Mediterranean musics were evoked, and in its own way tenor Maurizio Saiu's role, intoning a text drawn from a Sardinian poem, proved as extended, as experimental in sonority as that of the cello.

In Yong Yang's "Twilight in a Cold Gorge" for soprano and instrumental sextet, the treatment of an image-crowded Chinese text ("A white fox howling at the moon," it began) was amazingly seamless for being so variegated, darting in out of tonality as it did, interspersing a native folk manner with a sophisticated timbral fabric whose richly gamy and abrasive rich texture could have come out of Alban Berg. Shinobu Ta-

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kagi was the capable, steady-voiced soloist.

If we weren't hearing his "Elegia" exactly as its composer Stamatis Athanasoulas, imagined it - evidently there are no bouzouki players in North America who can read music - its rearrangement, employing William Buonocore on the mandolin, nevertheless yielded up a picture of a keen, quirky, almost feverishly driven invention. The constant mutations and recombinations in this dense but never murky divertimento saw to it that its dozen players always had a great deal to do. Theodore Antoniou's conducting was obviously a plus; the effect was exhilarating. The two works with piano that followed called for a less complicated setup. Tom Williams's "Ironwork" for piano and tape was another mostly "up" piece, even to resembling a sports event somewhat. The material issuing from the loudspeakers seemed to function as a goad to pianist John McDonald to be fast, motoric, jumpy, syncopated, etc., and not fall behind. A different tempo offered some relief, then (after some vamping) it was back to as it had been at the beginning, a giddy, cartoonish pursuit as if by click tape or possibly even wolves.

In contrast to those composers who give descriptive titles to their works but attach a disclaimer to the effect that they're not *really* programmatic, Paul Barsom says in his program note that "Vesper," composed for solo piano, is exactly that. "Fogs and Winds," "Off the Inland Desert," and "Berceuse" were the individual titles. As for the writing, this was pianistic and no-mistake - rapid-fire repeated notes with differing degrees of stress and lots of them, a hint perhaps of some of Messiaen's all-over-the-keyboard bird transcriptions, and to end with some still, radiant, open-sky music that seemed to these ears daringly Copland-esque and got away with it. Coming at the end, Richard Nelson's Illuminations (Klactoveedsedsteene I), despite the Charlie Parker allusion in its title, could have been aluding instead to the narrow range of compositional behavior that was all that was allowed at new-music concerts a generation back. This was

nicely turned, and professional, but also pretty tweedy and academic.

Stamatis Athanasoulas was the winner, and Tom Williams and Paul Barsom the runners-up.

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