

Soundshift Through The Garden of Memory:

A walk through New Music Bay Area's presentation at the Chapel of the Chimes,

Oakland 6/21/04.

David Slusser

I've lived just a block from the Oakland columbarium known as the Chapel of the Chimes for over 20 years, and along with my walks through the adjacent Mountainview cemetery, have occasionally stopped in for quiet contemplation in the Julia Morgandesigned setting. She imagined a haven of peace and tranquility, providing a labyrinth of cloisters, gardens, alcoves, fountains, stairways and chapels, rising into vaulted ceilings that let in abundant natural light. More than a place to house a loved one's ashes, the atmosphere invites contemplation, with the echoing marble caverns encouraging quietude. Additions eventually encompassed one and a half city blocks, on three levels in some parts of the maze-like structure. Once upon a time, they had live organ music daily, which at some point was broadcast locally. I remember finding transcription discs and a phone line labeled "Chapel of the Chimes" in my old production studio at KRE radio in the 70s. When 20th Century Forum (now New Music Bay Area) began their musical solstice presentations there in 1996, a brilliant, wholly new use for the space began.

Sarah Cahill, of New Music Bay Area, had the epiphany that started the ball rolling, while walking through the labyrinth, trying to find the source of some elusive music echoing through the chambers. This tantalizing sense of discovery remains, as room opens upon room, revealing new sights and sounds. The space, however, exerts a great influence on the music played there, not only for the reverence assumed while performing among mortal remains, but that the entirety of the air within holds and mixes all the sounds in unique ways. No one sound exists apart from the others, distant or faint as they may be. N.M.B.A.'s generosity in presenting so many musicians pushes this aspect to the fore; the blend is inescapable. After years of attendance, part of my enjoyment is noting how successfully a musician or group deals with the ever present, ever morphing resonance: acceptance, resistance, utilization, dominion. What works on stage or performance space may not even be appropriate here. A complex pattern, from a distance, loses the time relationships of its articulation, and becomes a blur of color, whose hue is determined by the weight of its strongest notes, and this legacy has impact beyond the immediate cluster of



listeners being entertained. Performers attempting dominion by loudness ought to know how intrusive this can be to neighboring musicians. This is much less a concert, than an installation piece; a "soundshift," where each audient makes their own program and sound mix, gravitating to adjust for taste, enjoying unique perspectives.

Born on an equinox, I handily accept the claims of heightened awareness on the solar quartering, much like that on a full moon. On this solstice, when the sun seemed to hang immobile in the late afternoon sky, I had time to see just little more than an hour of the 5 to 9 pm presentation. I had hoped to catch some old favorites like Henry Kaiser, and Miguel Frasconi (whose glass object music at this site remains an all time favorite), and the new Lines Ensemble, but what I looked forward to most were the spaces in between, where a dreamlike state envelopes you, and 'Alice in Wonderland' is made real. I knew it would be worth the trip no matter whom I saw, for the particular performers are secondary to the collective sound and chance discoveries. At the entrance I remembered the futility of trying to beeline to a desired musician, both from the (welcomed) large crowd bottlenecking and the layout, which maintains its mysteries despite the nicely prepared map provided in the program. The strat-continued on page 2

egy for my course was to avoid the tourists and seek the bliss. Using my ears as a sonic compass, I quickly found refuge in the opposite direction from the hubbub, quietly starting my experience in the nicest way. I came upon John Bischoff, beaming in a cool, slightly medieval chamber, while his laptop piece chirped from several directions on the perimeter. This was the "Chapel of Peace", and his tones were appropriately gentle and chime like, enhanced and accented with the addition of several relays, triggered along with the music from the computer, that activated small doorbell like mechanical devices about the room from time to time. An occasional portamento would seem to complete the piece, but really, there was something else completing it. John had left enough space for the collective sound to be present, and was fortunate in his position and proximity to sensitive neighbors. This was a very successful piece in this context; selfless, yet somehow reflecting its composer pleasant, thoughtful and charming. I had now become quite relaxed, and ready to feel the pull of some distant music.

At this point I need to admit I had a recording device along to aid in this analysis, lest anyone be impressed with my pitch retention. I was interested in the mutual influencing going on. Bischoff's piece sometimes suggested tonalities of F and Bb, with the note Ab drawing my attention, possibly because as I moved into a connecting garden mausoleum, this pitch was there and beyond. Here I came upon John Shiurba and Gino Robair, on guitar and synthesizer respectively, where I later learned that the ashes of their late friend Matthew Sperry were in proximity. I was but four feet away, but had to listen for a long time before I could make out what they were doing. Don't know if it was "lowercase", but it was an excellent example of the extreme end of listening to the collective space, and playing an appropriate proportion in an orchestral sense. Where Bischoff's and other laptop pieces could influence others, their set course could not actively be altered, yet my perception of his piece was certainly colored by outside sounds that drew me onward. This duo, playing in real time, could exert their free will, but did so in an almost inscrutable display of minimalism with e-bow, white noise and a little static. Perhaps they were enjoying the overall mix in this sonic backwater as much as I was, where the Ab somewhere in the midst of all this was now hovering halfway to G. I really couldn't put my finger on where it was coming from or how it was happening, and so began to appreciate how much the building was contributing as well as the players. Also contributing were the lovely voices of children at play, one of them Matthew's, I believe. The innocent yelps of wonder, distress and joy did not seem out of place anywhere I roamed in the chapel. With the musicians in front of me providing total transparence, the entrance of

a distant alto sax drew my attention, as if the foreground were accompaniment to the background. The unseen player's idiosyncratic intonation kept it apart from the whole, in my ears, so I eventually moved on, but not before a distant undercurrent of E came in, joined by a high A somewhere. As I moved through stairs and corridors, I encountered several exquisite spots, where an intoxicating balance of anonymous sounds came at me from several directions. The E had been replaced by a lower D in my sense of things. Was it a cello bowing low in the distance, and remarkably, a high string sound reflecting the earlier vibrations between Ab and G, with a motif alternating A, with A# and G. I was concluding minimalism to be a worthy method in this environment.

Now I came to the larger, multi-storied addition to the west, where Larnie Fox's robotic string instrument seemed to be accompanying Pamela Z's vocal work on the floor below, hanging suspended in the middle of the three-story airshaft. Spooled devices, not unlike the very simple depression era racer toys my dad taught me how to make as a kid, using a spool, matchstick and rubber band, rode two high wire trapezes. These each had a contact mic that fed an amplifier hidden under a nearby end table, and produced rich, slow glissandi, that would phase between parallel and contrary motion in a very arco cello way. This delightful invention worked really well with Z's vocal layering on the floor below, which was similarly cyclic, and of a syllabic nature. A lot of folks hung out here; the open air and Pamela's performance gifts drawing the curious and the dizzy to a bit of focus. She had the right approach of using a lot of space to allow the ambience in, and let her course go where it would. When you left her immediate area though, a drawback became apparent. To make a live voice blend effectively with an amplified delay loop of it, it needs to be amplified as well. Whatever degree of amplification she was using was a bit too heavy for her placement, for her presence was a bit more than the general wash others were contributing, and I found her to be an unknowing but strong collaborator with a few other ensembles. The secrets of the labyrinth were revealing themselves.

Next I sought a bit more solitude and reflection, ducking down a carpeted corridor to come upon the presciently monikered trombonist Monique Buzzarte, accompanied by laptop. Once again, the preprogrammed nature of a prepared laptop piece was apparent as I entered a sonic bubble anchored in Eb and Ab, a chromatic shift from the rooms behind, with the bubble effect enhanced by the carpeted area. The trombone though, sometimes played an A or G, linking to the other tonalities, which prompted thoughts that she didn't need the computer karaoke if she was already playing to the other sounds in

the space. It wasn't bad sounding, but I wondered why I was listening to an accordion sound playing off a laptop for her to play against, when the space could provide the same foil, and it seemed she had the ears and chops to do it. Still, a nice presentation, which surely had a contribution to the overall tonal resonances I had been identifying.

Retracing my steps to the mezzanine area, the glissing cello tones of Fox's robotic trapeze eased the shift back to the general ambience that now seemed to spell E major 7, which if looked at enharmonically as Ab minor, was now a lot closer to what the trombone had been doing. Not sure if Buzzarte's music had exerted a pull, since she was pretty mellow, but my sensation of the building's collective reflection left it a possibility. The crowd was pretty tight here. I think Carla Kihlstedt had replaced Pamela as the vocalist on the story below, a sweet voice floating on the bed of a shimmering violin loop, punctuated nicely by a few cries and shouts of children in tow. I had the sensation of something sinister lurking just under the surface of innocence and light, like the hidden presence of the big bad wolf. It was most likely the mournful slides of the trapeze and a group I had just spotted tucked into an alcove, the Mills Didjeridoo Ensemble. It took a while to get closes enough to be sure I was hearing them. Ah, the bittersweet rewards of a successful event; N.M.B.A. had brought in another huge turnout, exposing this music to a more general public. I liked that there was a crowd, but got a little bugged when they acted like tourists. More than once, while I was deeply listening, someone would say loudly right on top of me, "Well, there's nothing happening here, let's go over and see so-and-so", as if they didn't realize someone was performing right in front of them. I found applause, especially coming from a neighboring room, disrupting as well, for it breaks the spell of the music in your proximity. The musical experience in the Chapel of Chimes is continuous; it doesn't stop when one performer finishes; you have to leave the building. Perhaps it was a way for the tourists to break the tension and get a grip on reality, or someone was really doing their "act".

The Sanctuary of Compassion was not a good spot for the ghostly Didjeridoos, being small and carpeted, and very close to mezzanines and stairwells that conducted sounds from louder performers in more ambient spaces. I kept having to move in to differentiate them from the general mix, until I was literally under their noses. This proved dangerous when Tom Dill was swinging his trumpet on a tube around, but no one was hurt. What had been inaudible just outside the room was the cocoon of undulation I was now burrowed in. Marianne McDonald — doubling on harp and some of Dill's devices added a top end to the bubbling trance. Inescapable here were the sounds from other galleries. This group,

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and the listeners at their feet, did not have the option of ignoring it. They had to do their music in the context of the collective sum of the building's activities. The tube blowers, led by Toyoji Tomita, seemed to center on a low D tonality, with some presence of an F. Not sure whether Carla or Pamela were the singer on the floor below at this point, but they were as loud and present in this little room as the entire Mills ensemble itself. The directors need to rethink their policies on amplification and placement, for this was plain unjust. I doubt the singer was being similarly influenced, but I hung around for the effect, which actually became pretty and haunting, as a G# in her melody gave a Lydian cast to the forced collaboration. Another round of applause came as a non sequitur to this room, and a violin now did some business in Em while the Didjeridoos continued with a D pedal, maintaining an interesting relationship. The distant voice began centering on A, and somewhere a closer voice (Ron Heglin?) did so as well, just as a far off cascade of xylophone started to drift in from the floor above. This was sounding quite nice as I set out again to peruse the third floor.

The Didjeridoos disappeared a few feet from their chamber, and I walked the corridor to the stairwell in a milky swirl like the reverb return from an amusement park. A tenor sax, not playing loudly, demonstrated its carrying power in these environs, and I steered myself to get a better mix. More applause marred my approach, which otherwise would have been like coming quietly into a clearing to spot a few deer. Larry Ochs was the sax man, in trio with Miya Masaoka on koto and Joan Jeanrenaud on cello, and their work magically came into focus as I stepped nearer. Both strings were doing arco, which gave them a little weight to counter the tenor, while Ochs was doing his best not to overpower them. When they switched to plucking, I got a clearer sense of how much the background resonance was a part of things (We seemed to be around D again). I had maneuvered to a well-balanced listening position, closer to the strings, but my back was at a 3-story airshaft, which didn't help my overall dizziness. The trio, though, was absolutely delightful, and just got better as Lawrence switched to sopranino. They struck a nice balance with the sounds from elsewhere, where it seemed part of their piece, except when another round of applause wafted up. When they wound up a particularly focused improv and paused where applause normally would come, Jeanrenaud gave a little giggle, as if chagrinned that the music was going on without them, which it clearly was in the background. When they started again, it was in perfect tune with the backdrop, in B minor. In my reference to pitches, I don't wish to imply everyone was always using standard temperament. It's more of a means to track some relationship, which I did find. At the airshaft, I was hearing 3 floors worth of ensemble, now returning to D, the trio in front of me then pulling it to G major as they crescendoed to a finish. Uncannily, the one or two other closest performers stopped at the same time, and it felt like the building was pausing for a breath. More grinning as applause from a distant gallery seemed to acknowledge the efforts of the local trio. Then those in our gallery joined in Fine, they deserved it. I had trouble tearing myself away from their lovely tones, interplay and gamesmanship.

Before the applause was over, the xylophone I'd been hearing was at it again, now in F#, a half step down, but not totally unrelated to the previous progression. I headed off to see who was playing so manically at times. From afar, it had been a pastel reflection, closer a bright pulse, and now intense patterning. I had to laugh when I saw it was being played by three people with one mallet each. Of course it was my old pal, the amazing Willie Winant, intense as always, working with Isaac Anderson and Sam Aspovat, both of whom, I believe, have studied with him. They were as enjoyable to watch as listen to, and only a distant voice or two occasionally could be heard amid their percussive forays. There wasn't going to be a problem hearing them, so I wandered a little farther a field to the airy Chapel of Effulgence, aptly catching the last of this longest day's sunrays. Amid soothing tones, a woman was in the center of the room doing yoga. At first I thought she might be controlling some of the sounds with her movement (I was getting 'out there'), but then I saw my friend Dean Santomieri, and knew it must be his piece. He had prepared it in four channels, and was using a four-channel minidisk, something I'd never heard of, for looped playback. The spatial effect was excellent. While not musically ambitious, it certainly was right on for the Chapel's and the event's purposes of reflection and meditation. The part I caught was in D minor, relating to much of what I'd heard in the last hour. The xylophone could sometimes be heard, playing in the unrelated key of F# major, stressing the difference between open and closed systems, and putting bitonality in spatial, physical terms. Though Dean couldn't tune his piece to the mallets, they probably couldn't hear much past their instrument. This was a case where accommodation was mutually exclusive. And who says you have to accommodate or acknowledge? Mere juxtaposition is generally valid enough to begin critical analysis, and one of the joys of this event is finding something new around every corner. Yet for me, despite my admiration for the polish of any one presentation, I reserve my highest praise for the deep listeners and the ones who had no choice but to integrate surrounding sounds. I also have to stress that each of us in attendance heard something a

little different. I was there from 6:45 to 7:50 pm, and someone concurrently walking a different route at the same time heard something else entirely. This really is an incredible event on a national scale, with over 50 musicians participating, but at the same time, it's not about the musical performance. It's about the space, and I easily enjoyed the musicians who were "there" the most. Where on a performance stage, any of this might come off as lame 'new age', here virtuosity seemed a bit out of place. Play the room, indeed.

It was getting on time to split, so I headed back the way I came. I hadn't heard a fraction of what I'd hoped to see, but had been entranced the whole time nonetheless. Were the birds I was hearing coming from Dean's piece? Maybe, but there was a door open to an inviting twilight. I stepped into the refreshing cool breeze on the bluff behind the chapel, where a flock of birds were busy with the end of their day, accompanied by the fading sounds of a xylophone with six arms.

The complete list of this years performers: Mark Applebaum, John Bischoff, Monique Buzzarte, Sarah Cahill, Cornelius Cardew Choir, Antonio Celaya, Luciano Chessa, Paul Drescher & Joel Davel, Larnie Fox, Miguel Frasconi, Ellen Fullman, Shoko Hikage & Tari Nelson-Zagar, Brenda Hutchinson & Krys Bobrowski, Henry Kaiser, Chris Muir & Damon Smith, Carla Kihlstedt, Gregory T. Kuhn, Lines Ensemble, Mills Didjeridoo Ensemble, Miya Masaoka, Joan Jeanrenaud & Larry Ochs, Greg Moore, Maggie Payne, Natto Quartet, Gino Robair & John Shiruba, John Sanborn, Dean Santomieri, Jason Serinus, Laetitia Sonomi, Tonal Chaos, RoyWhelden & Karen Clark, William Winant with Isaac Anderson & Sam Aspovat, Ya Elah members and Pamela Z.









http://music.acme.com

1 block from Ashby BART

Sunday August 8 Noon to 11:00 PM

The Fourth Annual Transbay Skronkathon BBQ features continuous creative music all day served up on a bed of grillin' and chillin'. Bring something to slap on the grill (we'll bring the grill!), hang out and enjoy some skronky and sublime performances by old stalwarts as well as some new faces.

detailed schedule at the ACME web site

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August Concert Listings

PLEASE GO TO WWW.TRANSBAYCALENDAR.ORG FOR DETAILS ABOUT THESE EVENTS, PLUS UPDATES AND SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Sun 8/1 7:30 PM \$8, \$10 SIMM Series/ Outsound Research [Musicians Union Hall 116 9th St @ Mission SF]

The 3rd Annual Edgetone New Music Summit C.O.M.A / Forward Energy / Noertker's Moxie

Sun 8/1 8:15 PM Free, donations accepted ACME Observatory at The Jazz House [3192 Adeline Berkeley]

Art of One: Virtuoso solos by Chris Brown, Tom Djll, and Bob Marsh

Tue 8/3 8:25 PM The Oakland Box Theater [1928 Telegraph Avenue Oakland]

Moe! Staiano's Moe!kestra! (performing as separate orchestras in two separate rooms); The Joel Pickard/William Fowler Collins/Elise Baldwin Trio

Wed 8/4 8:00 PM \$22 - \$24 Kresge Auditorium, Stanford University [Law School Building (near Tresidder Student Union & Braun Music Center) Stanford University]

Jazz saxophonist legend Dave Liebman plays as part of the 2004 Stanford Jazz Festival.

Wed 8/4 8:00 PM \$5.00 The Jazz House [3192 Adeline @ MLK Berkeley]

The monthly Improvised Composition Experiment. Bring your instrument (drums and piano provided), musical ideas and approaches and play with us!

Wed 8/4 9PM \$5 Stork Club 21+ [2330 Telegraph Oak]

Moe! Staiano / Salane & Friends / Acoustic Virgin (with Myles Boisen)

Thu 8/5 - Sat 8/7 8:00 PM \$15 General, \$12 Student, \$40 Festival Pass SomArts Cultural Center [934 Brannan Street San Francisco]

The 2004 SFEMF combines new and emerging young artists with respected pioneers of the electronic music field. http://www.sfemf.org

Thu 8/5 8:00 PM \$6-10 Luggage Store Gallery New Music Series [1007 Market St. @ 6th Street SF]

Merlin Coleman - Music for voice & cello + Liz Allbee - Trumpet/Electronics + A.L. Dentel - Tape music works based on NYC subway

Sat 8/7 8:00 PM \$10 sfSoundSeries [Community Music Center SF 544 Capp Street (betw. 20th and 21st) SF]

minimalism and process: Andriessen, Glass, Lucier, and Reich

Sun 8/8 12:30 PM free, donations accepted ACME Observatory at The Jazz House [3192 Adeline Berkeley]

The Fourth Annual Transbay Skronkathon BBQ

Thu 8/12 8:00 PM \$6-10 Luggage Store Gallery New Music Series [1007 Market St. @ 6th Street SF]

8pm Ryan Snow (trombone)/Matt Nelson (tenor sax); accoustic solos & duos; 9pm TBA

Sat 8/14 9:30 PM Starry Plough [3101 Shattuck Ave @ Prince Berkeley]

Eddie Gale (CD Release); Mushroom (CD Release)

Thu 8/19 8:00 PM \$6-10 Luggage Store Gallery New Music Series [1007 Market St. @ 6th Street SF]

8pm The Adhoc Microtonal String Quartet 9pm Erik Glick Rieman - electronics/prepared rhodes

Tue 8/24 8:00 PM 5\$ 12 Galaxies [2565 mission St. San Francisco,CA]

Sam Flot Quintet & 7th Direction: SFQ's music is highly composed experimental rock mixed with jazz & improv with some spoken word

Fri 8/27 8pm \$8-\$15 The Jazz House [3192 Adeline Street, Berkeley]

Evander Music presents an evening with Trevor Dunn, Phillip Greenlief, and Ches Smith (two sets)

Sat 8/28 12:00 PM Exploratorium [3601 Lyon St. San Francisco, CA 94123]

How do we understand non-musical sounds, like beating hearts, squealing brakes, and clicking locks? Find out at this special listening event.

Sat 8/28 8:00 PM \$10 sfSoundSeries [Community Music Center SF 544 Capp Street (betw. 20th and 21st) SF]

duo recital: Kathleen Gallagher, flute, and Kyle Bruckmann, oboe

Sun 8/29 8:00 PM \$8, \$10 SIMM Series/ Outsound Research [Musicians Union Hall 116 9th St @ Mission SF]

Tri-Cornered Tent Show / Say Bok Gwai

Mon 8/30 8:00 PM \$8 \$5 student \$10 general CNMAT [1750 Arch St. Berkeley]

David Wessel and Chris Brown in a program featuring piano and electronics.

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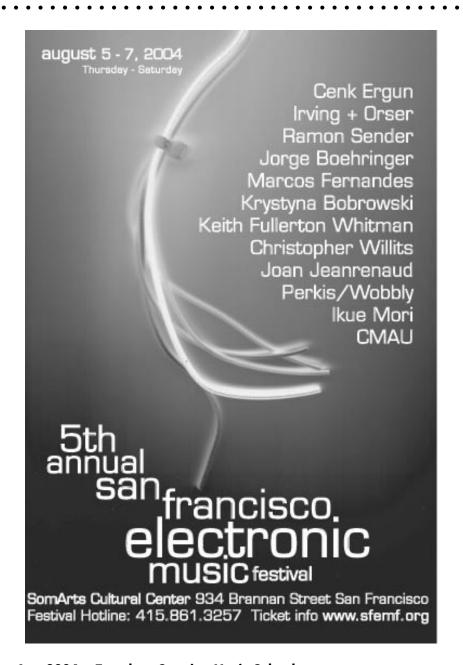
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Lost Trio is: Phillip Greenlief, Dan Seamans, Tom Hassett



Luggage Store Gallery New Music Series

Thursday, Aug 5 2004 8:00 PM

3 sets:

Merlin Coleman - voice & cello Liz Albee - trumpet/electronics

A.L. Dentel - tape music works based on NYC subway

Thursday, Aug 12 2004 8:00 PM

8pm Ryan Snow - trombone Matt Neison - terior sax accoustic solos & duos 9pm TBA

Thursday, Aug 19 2004 8:00 PM

8pm The Adhoc Microtonal String Quartet
Bob Marsh - cello
George Cremaschi - bass
Tara Flandreau - viola
Jonathan Segel - violin
9pm Erik Glick Flieman

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Scenes from the Matthew Sperry Memorial Concert held at 21 Grand on July 12. Left: Andrew Voigt and Scott Rosenberg; right: Lisa Sangita Moskow.





Discrete Palettes: Intersection and divergence I sound and image

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