

# Da Capo on Shuffle

## Da Capo Chamber Players, Matthew Cody (conductor), The Knitting Factory, New York City, 24.01.2006 (BH)

Eric Moe: *Hey Mr. Drummachine Man* (2004)

Philippe Hurel: *Pour Luigi* (1994)

Derek Bermel: *Language Instruction* (2003)

Gene Pritsker: *Sorrow, Like Pleasure, Creates Its Own Atmosphere* (2003)

Kyle Gann: *The Day Revisited* (2005)

Martin Bresnick: *Bird As Prophet* (1999)

Michael Gordon: *ac dc* (1996)

### Da Capo Chamber Players

Patricia Spencer, flute

Meighan Stoops, clarinet

David Bowlin, violin

André Emilianoff, cello

Blair McMillen, piano

### Guest Artists

Dennis DeSantis, dj

Kyle Gann, keyboard

Bernard Gann, electric bass

Matthew Cody, conductor

With an electronic "pseudo-canned drumbeat" as anchor, Eric Moe's *Hey Mr. Drummachine Man* offered pianist Blair McMillen the chance to show his considerable chops as well as his sense of humor. The slightly cheesy beat jumps right in, then continues inexorably as the pianist rides above it -- sort of "Bartók meets techno" (as well as 1970s television, it turns out, with a canny reference to the theme music from *The Phil Donahue Show*). If it wasn't an exercise in profundity, it slyly set the tone for the Da Capo Chamber Players' excursion into some repertoire they don't usually encounter.

Changing the mood completely, the insightful conductor Matthew Cody guided the ensemble in Philippe Hurel's *Pour Luigi*, with echoes of Andriessen and Messiaen in its chords often separated by silence. Hurel has professed an interest in combining jazz and funk rhythms with harmonies achieved through spectral techniques, and this intriguing piece is perhaps the apotheosis of this exploration. Da Capo produced lush, mouth-watering textures, all deftly coordinated by Mr. Cody in one of the highlights of the evening.

The first half concluded with Derek Bermel's entertainingly goofy *Language Instruction*, with nimble stage direction by David Cote. Bermel is an outstanding clarinetist who often writes with

a theatrical bent, and some of his works, to be effective, require much more than merely learning the scores. Inspired by his experience with Portuguese language tapes, Bermel has constructed a mini-drama in which the clarinet -- the versatile Meighan Stoops -- tries to "teach" phrases to the rest of the players. As Ms. Stoops "explained" a glissando figure to the other musicians, some were able to mimic it immediately, but Mr. McMillen responded with puzzlement, since the piano can't really duplicate the woodwind timbre. One could draw many conclusions from the humorous chaos that ensued, but perhaps Mr. Bermel is commenting on the rehearsal process itself.

Gene Pritsker's title is from Balzac's novel *Cousin Bette*, and is scored for flute and sampletra, an "orchestra" of sampled sounds including Indian voice and flute, drums and electronics. Patricia Spencer offered sensitive playing to complement Pritsker's waves of perpetual motion, creating a dreamlike landscape of fluttering, twittering sounds, breathing and eerie vocals. Microtones figure prominently in Kyle Gann's *The Day Revisited*, based on a 29-note octave, clustered around a droning D note. After a couple of false starts (apparently a keyboard was not cooperating, and this time not in jest, either) the ensemble settled into a satisfying groove, creating a clouds of floating timbres using Gann's self-described "simple harmonies."

I've now heard Martin Bresnick's sensuous *Bird As Prophet* two or three times, and without a doubt, David Bowlin's alert violin work puts him at the top of the interpretive list. The title is a reference to Schumann's piano miniature from *Waldszenen*, invoked with jazz great Charlie Parker. With Mr. McMillen in rapturous form on piano, Bowlin expertly characterized the work's rhapsodic, not-quite-tonal episodes, all imbued with a slightly melancholic tone -- gorgeous.

The evening ended with more Andriessen-esque precision with Michael Gordon's exhilarating *ac dc*, which the composer explains in typically terse style, "refers to electrical currents." There was certainly no shortage of wattage by Ms. Spencer, Ms. Stoops, Mr. Bowlin, cellist André Emilianoff and Mr. McMillen. If any of these works were to embody the night's aesthetic and show the mettle of these outstanding players, this grueling piece (as well as the Hurel) might be the one. Further, the Knitting Factory's intimate caverns are known primarily for housing alternative rock and jazz, but the place works remarkably well for a *Da Capo*, celebrating its 35th anniversary this season and seemingly reinventing itself in the process.

Bruce Hodges