

its construction, and by near-constant bends and slides between pitches: these were playfully combined into textures of often exceptional delicacy, their varied inflections coming to sound almost like baby talk. What sounded like echoes of particular pieces of music which Pounds might have remembered hearing from the instrument also appeared to surface intermittently.

The concert concluded with Chris Corrigan's *Is Fada an Lá*, a piece for soprano saxophone (Enzo Filippetti), harp (Seunghee Han) and electronics based around a traditional Irish lament. The lament's melody was presented simply at the outset, and its words were subsequently heard in a recitation which formed the core of the piece's electronic component. Corrigan's desire to explore the importance of ornamentation in traditional performances of these kinds of songs was reflected in the prominence of trills and tremolos in the saxophone part; these, as well as ostinato patterns and pedal effects from the harp, were expanded by the electronics to atmospheric effect.

Concert No. 16

Thursday, June 20, 2019, 8.00 p.m.

Sheen Center, Loreto Theater

Reviewed by Jonathan Pitkin

On Thursday evening, ICMC delegates returned to the Loreto Theater to hear a substantial program which mainly comprised works for solo instrumentalists and electronics.

The concert began with Anna Rubin's *A Small Impromptu God of the Partial*, a piece which required the performer, cellist Madeleine Shapiro, to alternate between two bows: a traditional one, and a second with beads attached, so as to allow noisier material to be introduced alongside the more conventional playing. The electronics part included whispering, laughter and streams of indistinguishable vocal syllables as well as material derived from the cello part; the composer's intention was for this to subtly inflect the soloist's performance. This led to a noticeable variety in the way the two parts interacted: in some passages the electronics sustained and modulated selected cello pitches; in others the two seemed to follow their own courses, like parallel streams. The 'partials' of the

title were most clearly audible in the filter sweep-like effects at the very end.

David Taddie's *Wayward Country* combined three layers of saxophone sound: the live performance of Justin Massey on alto, the composer's real-time processing of this material, and combinations of pre-recorded samples taken from both the alto and bass members of this instrumental family. Massey's part explored a wide variety of registers and effects, ranging from long, single notes, through more rhapsodic passages, to a final, virtuosic frenzy. The electronic accompaniments, which put their source material through extensive transformations, faded in almost imperceptibly, appearing glassily impassive at times but also contributing to stretches of sharper interplay with the soloist.

Christopher Hopkins described his piece *Touché* as a duo-concertante in which two clarinet soloists engage in musical contests, both between themselves, and against a computer-generated ensemble of synthetic counterparts. The two live performers, Esther Lamneck and Mariane Gythfeldt, were combined in some time-honored ways, moving in parallel, or interlocking

in imitative textures which highlighted the spiky modality and constantly shifting meters and accents of Hopkins' material. Against this, the electronic part provided a gently pulsing, continuous rhythmic backing for much of the piece, but on several occasions ventured more assertively into registral territory above and below the live acoustic sound, becoming clipped and percussive.

Natsuki Kawakami's *Style of Bird* also called for two live performers: a flutist (Sungjun Lee) and pianist (Jung-Ah An), whose parts were both based on the song of the Narcissus Flycatcher. Like Hopkins's piece, and in contrast to the improvisatory quality that characterized most of the other works on the program, it had what appeared to be a carefully pre-constructed instrumental duo at its center. Kawakami's piano writing alternated between percussive sonorities and more continuous, moto perpetuo textures. Against this, the flute part was more gestural, leaving rests in which each statement was left to reverberate. The live electronics shadowed these contributions closely, thickening the texture with delays, accumulations of echoes and pitch-shifted parallel

melodic lines, as well as some more extended transformations that pushed the music almost towards machine sound.

Mara Helmuth's *Sound Dunes* was described by its composer as a "collaborative composition" between herself and the performer, in this case Esther Lamneck, who had returned to the stage as a tárogató soloist. The piece certainly took full advantage of the characteristics of Lamneck's playing that had become particularly prominent over the course of the day's performances: rapid fingerwork, suppressed energy, pronounced vibrato and above all a rich, full-bodied tone color. The electronic transformations of the tárogató sound, as well as responding directly to these qualities, made a feature of sustained, breathy swells, which subsequently became more insistent. Like Taddie's piece, it all concluded in a blaze of virtuosity.

The title of Orlando Garcia's *separacion* alluded to the separation between a live saxophonist, Enzo Filippetti on soprano, and an accompanying tape part - which, like that of Taddie's piece, was based on pre-recorded saxophone

samples. As it turned out, the degree of separation between these two elements was extremely subtle: they were blended into near-indistinguishability for much of the piece. Making extensive use of circular breathing, Garcia created a completely continuous texture, almost accordion-like, in which clusters of sustained tones seemed to shimmer as a result of subtle detunings between live and recorded pitches.

Manuella R. Blackburn's *Snap Happy* was the only fixed media composition on the program. It was based entirely on recordings of cameras, both vintage models and more modern digital equivalents, including cellphones - some of the sounds of which, as the composer pointed out, are themselves recordings of superseded mechanisms. Blackburn wove her source material into an evocative, playful-sounding collage, making use of loops to sustain distinct pitches when these became audible, and to bring out characterful rhythmic patterns. The transitions between each of the three short movements saw a thinning-out of the texture before the music (and, in the mind's eye, the machines that were making it) sprang back into life.

Andrew May's *Ada* was the only piece on the program to make explicit use of pre-existing music - namely, a movement from Bach's first solo violin sonata. This was used as a kind of central skeleton for both Maja Cerar's "guided improvisation" and a computer part which tracked and responded to her, making use of samples taken not only from the violin but also the mandolin, with violin pizzicati acting as a bridge between the two. These sonorities were often combined into unpredictably-timed bursts of attacks, contrasting with the sense of distance (acoustic as well as historical) created by the treatment of the Baroque material.

Gayle Young's *Burrage Lake* also featured a live improvisation - the creative importance of which was acknowledged here by its exponent, Madeleine Shapiro, being given joint billing as a co-composer. Like Blackburn's, the piece also made use of real-world sounds that we were invited to hear in a more musical way than we might normally - specifically, waves breaking against rocks. These watery effects took on a striking closeness as a result of their presentation in full-spectrum,

immersive continuums; against these the cello played rhapsodically, but also made considerable use of body effects which themselves came to sound almost like a field recording.

The instrumental sonorities used in Zuriñe F. Gerenabarrena's *Barne* also lean towards the qualities of electronic sound, even when presented without transformations: if we had not been able to see Patti Cudd moving swiftly around a varied array of percussion instruments, we might have assumed at times that we were already listening to synthesized material. When the electronics were used, they subtly prolonged and recombined the acoustically-produced gestures and effects, which also included some vocalizations.

The performers all coped admirably with technical delays, false starts and last minute changes to the program, bringing together an ambitious and varied collection of pieces which were presented with great commitment and considerable theatricality.