

Review *Music*

Bold new music looks to old roots

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By David Patrick Stearns

INQUIRER MUSIC CRITIC

Contemplating alternative states of being has long been a preoccupation in music, a medium that easily accommodates the unimaginable.

Much of New York's opera intelligentsia is reeling over David T. Little's recently premiered *Dog Days*, whose bloody, devastating climax was accomplished purely through electronic means. Though the young composers heard in the Voice Electric concert Friday at the Annenberg Center are still finding their voices, they are doing so aided by electronically generated sound that readily takes the ear into the ether waves with an ease and fluidity not available to past generations. Laptops, in fact, were an essential presence in this concert presented by Network for New Music and the composer collective Voice of This Generation, a product of

2011's Philly Fringe Festival.

The six hugely different works all had good things to offer, though they were of interest mostly for what they will lead to. Two have strong 19th-century roots: In "Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen," Eliza Brown seized upon the Mahler song of the same title, often splintering the text and framing it with a Brian Eno-esque electronic backdrop suggesting the song's protagonist was not having an easy transition to the Other Side.

"Automata" by Tony Solitro seized upon an E.T.A. Hoffmann tale about a man communing with a nonexistent female illusion, characterized by an offstage soprano voice heard in an electronic haze in a well-paced musical narrative that one hopes will grow into a fully fledged opera.

In the program's two instrumental works, Adam Vidiksis used commonplace percussion (bowls and such) in "Synapse

Circuit" with an electronically produced frame giving each sound such a deep-colored radiance you could miss the piece's shape for being caught up in each moment. James Falconi's "... Con solo le macchine" had a rhapsodic violin solo against a rumbling, elemental-sounding electronic backdrop suggesting a lone voice on a barren landscape.

Neither words nor music in Luke Carlson's "Eternity," (based on an Ashley Change poem) found their focus until halfway through, but the blending voice and cello with spare, otherworldly sounds from an electronically refracted vibraphone were magical as the poem describes the exact moment of death.

Best of all was Melissa Dunphy's "June." Baritone Brian Ming Chu's unaccompanied voice was electronically reprinted in canonic counterpoint, growing into four or five voices playing leapfrog with one another. The first of the two songs explored Lauren Rile Smith's poem about the lethargy of summer heat with great poetic control, neatly scaling back the electronic activity when necessary but ultimately conveying, with considerable mastery, the delirium of congested thought patterns. More, please.

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