

# THE REHEARSAL STUDIO

A PLACE TO EXERCISE IDEAS BEFORE WRITING ABOUT THEM WITH GREATER DISCIPLINE.

TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 2024

## An Uneven Evening with Earplay

Last night my wife and I live-streamed the latest program to be presented by Earplay at Old First Presbyterian Church. The title of the program was *Life Cycles*, and Allegra Chapman appeared as pianist to substitute for Earplayer Brenda Tom. Unfortunately, the pre-concert conversation was not available for streaming; but we were able to view the performance itself in its entirety.

This “morning after” I found myself reflecting on Forrest Gump’s box of chocolates. There is so much diversity in any one Earplay program that the overall experience is best expressed in the unforgettable words of Forrest’s mother: “You never know what you’re gonna get!” As a result that journey tends to follow a path of highs and not-so-highs.



Terrie Baune, Allegra Chapman, and Thalia Moore playing Chengjin Koh’s “The flower mantis” (screen shot from last night’s video stream)

The “high” of the evening came right after the intermission. This was the West Coast premiere of “The flower mantis,” the composition by Chengjin Koh what won the prize in last year’s Earplay Donald Aird Composers Competition. Instrumentally, the work was a piano trio with Chapman joining forces with violinist Terrie Baune and Thalia Moore on cello. The title of the work was “The flower mantis;” and it was the narrative foundation of the music that raised it above the more abstract offerings of the evening.

Koh structured the piece in four episodes, played without interruption, entitled “Blooming,” “Stalking,” “Waiting,” and “The Kill.” The rhetoric of her composition provided just the right path through those episodes, drawing upon just the right instrumental sonorities to forge that path. I also have to confess that, even with the sinister qualities of the predator, there was an upbeat quality to the music that made the narrative journey worth taking.

On the more abstract side, “The flower mantis” was followed by “Dyades,” described by composer Haris Kitos as “a duet between two duets (flute+violin, bass clarinet+cello).” This emerged as a study of the elaborate textures that emerge when each of the duets has a slightly different tempo than the other. Awareness of those textures arose through the fact that each duet involved the coupling of a wind and a string instrument, while the pairs themselves were distinguished according to register. The string players were again Baune and Moore, and the winds were performed by flutist Tod Brody and Peter Josheff on bass clarinet.

STEPHEN SMOLIAR



The author's construction of his reality of self!

ABOUT ME

STEPHEN SMOLIAR

Still trying to “liberate the mind from fear, superstition and pettiness.”

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Sadly, the first half of the program had less impact. This included the world premier of “Forms & Doubles,” written by Chris Castro on an Earplay commission, the West Coast premiere of Toshio Hosokawa’s “Threnody,” and Erik Ulman’s “Skamandros II.” Sadly, I came away from each feeling that the composer’s text précis offered more than the music itself.

POSTED BY STEPHEN SMOLIAR AT 6:53 AM 

LABELS: CHAMBER MUSIC, KEYBOARD MUSIC, MUSIC

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