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Darmstadt Essential Repertoire at Issue Project Room (https://www.feastofmusic.com/feast_of_music/2011/12/feldman-stockhausenterry-riley-issue-project-room-darmstadt.html)



by Caleb Easterly and Pete M. (https://www.feastofmusic.com/about.html)

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As I mentioned previously (https://www.feastofmusic.com/feast_of_music/2011/12/darmstadt-essential-repertoire-at-issue-project-room.html), Issue Project Room (http://www.issueprojectroom.org/) hosted their annual Darmstadt Essential Repertoire fest last weekend, packing the house on three consecutive nights for music that was as thrilling as it was challenging. The performances also were among the last to be held in the Old Can Factory in Gowanus, as Issue prepares to move into its' new space at 110 Livingston (http://www.issueprojectroom.org/2011/11/28/2012-the-exciting-year-ahead/) early next year.

Morton Feldman's *For Christian Wolff* (1986) - which kicked things off on Thursday night - is a massive work, clocking in at almost 180 minutes. Like many of Feldman's later works, it explores extremes of length and the intimate lower end of the dynamic spectrum. Much of the work is static, with gentle dissonances and motifs that unfold over hours. Taken as a whole, it evokes a changeable, pointillist landscape, where all sense of time is lost.

Written for flute and piano (doubling celesta), the instrumentation is sparse, with the piano often playing just a single note to complement the flute. Phrases and notes are repeated dozens of times, only to release into graceful, pure chords, like a sigh of relief. Sparse rhythms and shifting patterns are constructed and deconstructed at a glacial pace. No moment is without intention.



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Keyboardist Nicholas DeMaison, best known as the director of Ensemble Sospeso (http://sospeso.com/), and flutist Amelia Lukas performed with grace and solemnity, holding the audience in breathless suspension for the entire three hours. Mr. DeMaison displayed fluidity and dexterity, and his voicings of Feldman's trance-like chords were spine-tingling. Ms. Lukas performed the extremely difficult flute part with ease and smooth tone, and it was only a fault of the venue that the acoustic balance was uneven, with the flute almost always too loud.

The performers were lit with an eerie blue light that was well chosen for the character of this piece. Unfortunately, the small, dry space did the music no favors: most recordings of Feldman's pieces are drenched in reverb, which helps give them a more mystical quality. In this space, the lack of bounce drew a sharp contrast between the piano/celesta (played with the sustain pedal down) and the flute (which has no such option.)

As the piece ended, the shadowy motifs are broken up by periods of longer and longer silence until the music finally fades away into austere silence. Mr. DeMaison and Ms. Lukas held still for almost a full minute to punctuate the solemn monument we had just heard.



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On Friday night, trumpeter/composer Joe Drew (http://analogarts.org/members/drew/) took over the soundboard to present three electronic works by Karlheinz Stockhausen (http://www.stockhausen.org/). An NYU doctoral fellow, Drew has become something of a specialist in Stockhausen's music, working closely with the estate to recreate the late composer's music in this country. In 2009, Drew produced the U.S. premiere of *Cosmic Pulses* (2007), and has toured "Michael's Journey Around the World," the second act from Stockhausen's massive seven-opera cycle, *Licht*.

For the performance, the room was set up with eight speakers and sub-woofers, set up along the perimeter. This meant that, depending on where you sat in the long, narrow room, you heard different aspects of each piece. *Telemusik* (1966) was filled with dense beeps and blips, sounding like some back-to-the-future soundtrack. Joe pulled out his trumpet to perform *Trumpet from Orchestra Finalists* (1996), from the Wednesday opera of *Licht*. An aggressive voice (Stockhausen's?) counted to seven in German while Joe played extended tones over the electronics.



(https://www.feastofmusic.com/.a/6a00d8341c4fb353ef01675eb99262970b-popup)But, the main draw of the

evening was *Cosmic Pulses*: a 35 minute work from 2007 that turned out to be Stockhausen's final electronic composition. Among those in attendance Friday night, I can safely assume that, besides Joe, I was probably the only one who'd heard *Cosmic Pulses* before - in my case, the world premiere, with Stochkausen himself at the soundboard. That performance, in Rome's Sinopoli Hall, had the advantage of concert-hall acoustics, the swirling sound enveloping the audience from eight distant single-channel speakers. Some of the spatial resonance between the channels was lost in Issue's tight confines, but the swirling effect was still clearly discernible. (It didn't help that I was stuck in a corner seat, literally on top of one of the subwoofers.) There was also a beehive intensity to the Issue performance, like being stuck on some kind of dark, trippy thrill ride.

After the performance, I spoke briefly with Joe about my experience in Rome, and he told me about the U.S. premiere in Omaha, of all places. He showed me the DVD of *Cosmic Pulses* he had secured from the Stockhausen estate. "I had to actually go to Kürten to observe a performance and receive detailed instructions before they'd allow me to perform it," he told me. "I ripped the disc into my computer, and separated the tracks out in ProTools. If you try to listen on your computer, all you'll hear is a bunch of distortion from all of the bass."



(https://www.feastofmusic.com/.a/6a00d8341c4fb353ef0162fdc934f7970d-popup)This year's Darmstadt

wrapped up with the 7th annual performance of Terry Riley's *In C*, a work which seems to be almost ubiquitous these days, thanks to it's open framework. I've seen performances using anywhere from 10 to 80 musicians, employing all sorts of different instrumentation. Issue's version leaned heavily on rock instruments, including no fewer than four electric guitars (among them Elliott Sharp and Issue's own Zach Layton) and former Swans drummer Jonathan Kane, using a full kit. Among the others involved were Joe Drew (trumpet), Matt Marks (horn), Todd Reynolds (amplified violin), and trio of singers.

This was undoubtedly the loudest version of *In C* I've ever witnessed, which robbed the experience of its typical ebb and flow but definitely contributed to the "party vibe" Zach said he wanted to instill. "It's become something of a New York tradition," Nick said prior to the performance. "I can say that, right?" Yep.



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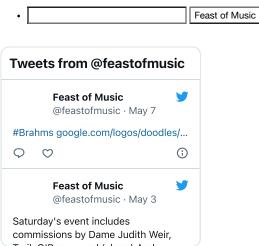
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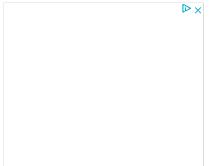
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Saturday, May 20 🔻 Today 8:00pm New York Philharmonic Tuesday, May 23 7:30pm Kathleen Supové and N Thursday, May 25 7:30pm New York Philharmonic Friday, May 26 7:00pm Tacos, Tequila and Tave Friday, June 2 8:00pm New York Philharmonic Friday, June 16 Events shown in time zone: Eastern Time - N





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