

**Concert Report:  
New Music at Youngstown State University (March 3)**

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Concerts of new music are exciting events, especially when they bring together composers of several generations who are obviously enthusiastic about the act of musical creation. Such was the case on Wednesday evening (March 3) in Bliss Recital Hall at Youngstown State University as the New Music Society and the New Music Guild, Inc. presented their “Annual Winter Pops” Concert with the Dana Composers Ensemble and guest artists Corinne Morini, soprano, Anthony Ruggieri, piano & Micah Howard, double bass. Composers and performers ranged from YSU undergraduates to adults several generations older.

“Winter Pops” seems a strange way to describe a new music concert, but director Robert Rollin explained that there were a number of lighter works on tonight’s program among its seven first performances.

YSU senior Daniel Brandt was represented by three works. His ‘Prelude for Guitar’, an alternately ruminative and agitated work engagingly played by Margaret Jones served as an attractive prelude to the evening as well. Stephen Cline was at the piano for Brandt’s ‘Three Nocturnes’ (exploring the moods of an insomniac whose restlessness was supposed to end in sleep but who still seemed to be tossing and turning at the end), a set of pieces that also explored various styles and textures. Brandt’s third work, ‘Synapses’, for alto saxophone and bass clarinet, expertly performed by Joseph Finkel and Patrick Fulton, showed the most well developed personality of all of Brandt’s works. Motives were

effectively tossed back and forth with cerebral electricity.

Richard Zacharias contributed a three-movement ‘Sonata for oboe and piano’ with colorful titles (“Umbrellas in the Monsoon”, “Bounce, Pray, Bounce More”) that put forth and developed some interesting musical ideas. Its performance by oboist Nathan Welch and pianist Tim Webb was dedicated by the composer to Dana faculty member Tedrow Perkins in honor of his distinguished work with students. We’d like to hear the sonata again after it settles in a bit more. A little distraction in this performance was the regular jettisoning of score pages from the piano onto the floor.

Three short works also received their first performances. Sophomore Samantha Hogan’s ‘Reign of Thunder’ for flute and piano may not quite have evoked the stormy day the composer had in mind, but its ideas were well formed and both flutist Shanyse Strickland and pianist Cory Davis nailed its deceptively tricky details. Harpist Jacob Chevien played his own, improvisatory piece, ‘Were I to Forget Thee’, creating some lovely sounds and using some extended techniques. Tim Webb returned to the piano for a fleet-fingered account of his ‘Devil’s Playground’, accurately described in the notes as “a very rapid movement influenced by bebop jazz style”.

Director Robert Rollin offered two first performances on Wednesday evening. First up, his ‘Three Songs on Poems by Emily Dickinson’, written for and performed by soprano Corinne Morini (pictured above), with Anthony Ruggiero at the piano. The poems reflect Dickinson’s personal neuroses in “I dreaded that First Robin So” (with all its scary backyard creatures) as well as her metaphysical visions in “The Brain is Wider than the Sky” and “Musicians Wrestle Everywhere” (the latter also set for chorus by Elliot Carter in his earlier and more accessible style period). Rollin’s accomplished settings tended toward the abstract rather than the affective. Much of the piano writing was in a sparse, semi-dissonant two part texture which cast the vocal

line in sharp relief and allowed the words to come through clearly. Ms. Morini was a superb interpreter of her vocal line, floating some astonishing high passages in the third piece and negotiating some complicated vocalises Rollins introduced into the third song.

Rollins' 'Fantasy/Samba' has been waiting a year for its premiere. Pittsburgh Symphony bassist and YSU graduate Micah Howard (pictured above) ended the suspense with a strong performance of this Brazilian inspired solo work -- his own request for a dance based piece -- simultaneously bowing and plucking the strings, tapping the top board and getting into the groove of the dance rhythms. The work ends with long notes, the final of which dramatically fades into silence. Rollin had first hand experience with Brazilian samba as pianist in a jazz trio with Francisco Mondragon Rio in the 70's, and he obviously knew what he was doing in this piece.

The last work on the program, a solo guitar piece by the late Augustin Barrios called 'Una limosna por el amor de Dios', brought the program

to a meditative and elegiac conclusion. Its simultaneous layers (bass on the bottom, melody in the middle, fast filigree tremolos on top) were beautifully played by Ben Dague.

Held in the expansive, multi-purpose Bliss Recital Hall, tonight's concert was agreeably informal, and the good-sized audience was highly supportive of each composer's and performer's efforts. A great atmosphere for encouraging creativity. The professional-looking program included extensive notes and advertising from a bank, a TV channel, a fashion designer, an apartment building and a state representative all of whom pledged themselves to "supporting the arts at YSU", indicating what a central position the University occupies in the cultural life of the region.

The next big new music event at YSU is the 26th Dana New Music Festival, which will take place from April 21-25. Guest artists include the South African Ensemble, the Munoz/Ilusorio Duo and composer Johnterryl Plumeri.