

Music Appreciation 101-01

September 30, 2009

### The School of Music Faculty Showcase

In attending my first concert of the year I was greatly pleased with the wide array of musical genres represented, although each piece was composed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A compilation of jazz, avant-garde, and chamber music, the artists explored many different musical techniques including but not limited to: texture, rhythm, and tone color to express a variety of emotion and ideas.

The evening began with the Smokey Mountain Brass Quintet and a stellar performance of Vince Gassi's *Bob Is Not My Uncle*. The warm texture of the brass instruments invited the audience to tap their feet to the upbeat tempo that resonated throughout the auditorium. This was one of my favorite pieces. At times I felt the influence of the Irish in the trumpets and lively pace, driven by the drums, keeping regular meter. On top of this rhythm the other musicians played with great energy, at times emphasizing notes by giving them a dynamic accent, causing the melody to jump forward. Personally, jazz is best live, where the audience is capable of experiencing music coming straight from the artists themselves. As a whole, this polyphonic piece was a fantastic introduction, and I greatly enjoyed both the auditory and visual aspects of it.

A majority of the music composed and listened to in the 21<sup>st</sup> century fails to explore the abstract, mainly due to the fact that most individuals want instant gratification. The next piece, *Three Pieces for Vibraphone*, composed by Gitta Steiner, encompasses a completely different approach towards music that pushes the boundaries of the status quo. The unconventional timing, tone color, and style of this avant-garde

piece instantly grasped me by showing me what it means to *listen*. Initially, it was struck by the lack of regular rhythm but as the melody progressed my mind was forced to expand, absorbing the piece as a whole, rather than waiting for a hook to tap my foot to. Furthermore, I had never listened to a vibraphone previous to this concert. I was intoxicated by the resonating sounds it produced, lingering for a moment, only to be replaced by another single or multiple tones. At times, the pitched seemed random, encompassing a wide range of octaves, then, suddenly the artist would stay within a certain octave. The piece was quiet, or *piano*, creating an eerie aura that I was drawn towards. All of these elements contributed to the dark but pensive tone of *Three Pieces for Vibraphone*. Due to the constant change of tempo, the piece was deceptively long. I was drawn into the silences and lack of meter, which seemed to bother other members of the audience.

On the other hand, my least favorite aspect of the concert was the opera performance of *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*, by Lori Laitman. A part of a collection of poems written by children of the Holocaust, *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* is a heart-wrenching tale of the desolation and hopelessness faced by Jewish children in German ghettos. However, I have never enjoyed opera, which emphasizes vocals so strongly that they sound strained; I prefer music that utilizes instruments and tone color to convey anguish, distress, and pain. The poem didn't seem to flow very well when sung, and the rhythm of the saxophone didn't groove with the soprano, who seemed to be moving at another tempo altogether. However, I do appreciate the artistic skill of both musicians and the beauty of the work, realizing that opera is not one of my personal favorites.

In conclusion, I enjoyed the exposure to some new styles of music and other genres that I have already learned to love, such as the funky *Work Song*, which closed the concert and had the whole crowd moving to the beat. As a whole, the concert encompassed many different artists creating a wide variety of timbre, style, rhythm, duration, and pitch. My musical knowledge grew immensely and my love for music developed past a desire for instant gratification: I learned to listen for something more in the complex rhythms of the vibraphone and what it means to feel the blast of a brass section live.