

THE REHEARSAL STUDIO

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

SUNDAY, APRIL 11, 2021

SFCMP Reflects on Olly Wilson

Last night the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players (SFCMP) presented the first of its two concerts entitled *PostScript to the Future*, the **at the CROSSROADS** offerings for the current season. The series provides retrospective and prospective views based on the life and legacy of composer Olly Wilson, one of the preeminent composers of African American descent, who died in Berkeley on March 12, 2018. (He had retired from teaching at the University of California in 2002.)

When Wilson was teaching at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music between 1965 and 1970, he established the first-ever conservatory program in electronic music. Last night's program began with a reflection on that achievement. Clarinetist Jeff Anderle played Wilson's "Echoes," written for clarinet and pre-recorded electronics in 1975.

In many respects "Echoes" is a reflection (echo?) on the *Synchronisms* compositions of Mario Davidovsky, working with tape music created at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center. The first piece in that set, composed in 1963, was scored for solo flute and tape. Davidovsky did not get around to a solo clarinet interacting with tape until 2006, which was the last of his twelve *Synchronisms* pieces.

Wilson's approach to this technique definitely sets him apart from Davidovsky's work. To a great extent the overall logic behind the *Synchronisms* pieces is one of symmetries that emerge through the reflections between instrument and recording. Wilson, on the other hand, seemed to be more inspired by jamming, establishing a give-and-

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The author's construction of his reality of self!

ABOUT ME

STEPHEN SMOLIAR

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

take rhetoric between those two sources. Given that the recording cannot “respond” to the instrumentalist, the one-sidedness of the situation makes for a delicate high-wire act. However, over the course of many of his performances, Anderle has developed a keen sense of reflection; and that sense brings Wilson’s score to life, capturing the spirit of jamming, if not the “flesh.”

“Echoes” was followed by the winning composition in the annual SF Search for Scores competition managed by SFCMP. The 2020 search encouraged submissions that would reflect on Wilson’s spirit. The winning composition was created by Josiah Tayaq Catalan, who gave it the title “unravel.” The piece was composed for solo piano, played at last night’s performance by Allegra Chapman.

“First contact” with a brand-new composition is always a dicey undertaking. Nevertheless, Chapman’s performance served up a highly engaging account of the intense energy expressed in Catalan’s score. Whether or not that energy “unravels” as the piece progresses will be left as an exercise for the listener. However, as Chapman observed prior to her performance, Catalan clearly wanted to incorporate the full scope of the piano keyboard; and his energetic rhetoric was probably quite a demand on Chapman’s approach to execution. However, that energy was clearly contagious; and it captured Chapman in such a way that she could convey the impact to the attentive listener.

Tickets for viewing this program will be available through this coming May 10.

POSTED BY STEPHEN SMOLIAR AT 6:51 AM 

LABELS: CHAMBER MUSIC, KEYBOARD MUSIC, MUSIC

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