

Continuum by DRUMatiX Reviewed by Greg Marginson

Saturday June 11, 2005

ANU School of Music Llewellyn Hall

DRUMatiX is the percussion ensemble of the ANU School of Music students directed by the Head of Percussion, Gary France. These concerts are marked by a distinctive style both in content and presentation, which was a feature again in this outing.

Six short pieces were featured in the first half, four from the leading American avant garde, Steve Reich and John Cage, the other two a work by Japanese composer Takemitsu, and the first western work solely for percussion Ionisation composed in 1933 by Edgard Varèse. The second half comprised Kazimierz Serocki, Continuum and the work composed by Nigel Westlake for a silent film *The Invisible Man*.

Reich's *Music for Pieces of Wood* is for specially tuned African claves, five players hitting pieces of wood in overlapping patterns the effect not unlike singing crickets or cicadas. It is a fun piece to hear and seemed like the ensemble enjoyed it too.

Rain Tree by Toru Takemitsu for three players for marimba, vibraphone and crotales played across the front of the stage, was let down by lighting effects intended to emphasize the rhythmic patterns but instead confusing them.

Three Cage pieces rounded out the first half, two short piano pieces titled *A Room* played by Edwina Berry exist both for a normal piano and the other for prepared piano, the other *She is Asleep* is for four tom-tom players each on 3 tom-toms striking the edge or centre of each making six separate sounds. These works form a suite, displaying Cage's play with, and fascination for, timbre and patterns in sound.

France energetically conducted the exuberant *Ionisation* for twelve percussionists and a myriad of instruments including two anvils and an air raid siren. Its structure and form seems to reflect music of the second half of 20th century not the first half from which it comes

The second half works were the undoubted concert highlights. Serocki's *Continuum* places six sets of percussion around the Llewellyn Hall to the sides of the audience and even behind. An early and effective attempt in sound, real 6:1 surround sound tightly performed with stick cues and glances between the performers.

The final work is composed by Nigel Westlake for a silent film *The Invisible Man* and the work was performed as intended with a showing of the short and somewhat mysteriously surreal silent film, its surrealism and absurdity highlighted through effective and tightly performed percussion work.

Gary France's approach to both teaching and performance breathes life into the often complex and challenging classical percussion repertoire. For me this concert effectively continues the DRUMatiX tradition of high standard, sophisticated and energetic percussion performance. So why not some commissions of new work?

