

Brian – blogger in LA

Come into my parlor

May 15, 2008



The EAR Unit and John Luther Adams
Photo : mine 2008

It's been a week for chamber music at the Walt Disney Concert Hall with two very different programs in two very different spaces. Upstairs in the main hall, the L.A. Philharmonic hosted its final chamber music program of the season. The L.A. Phil's chamber music programming has had somewhat of a rocky road since the opening of the new hall. Prior to WDCH, these 8 or so shows a season featuring chamber music played by various combinations of the Phil members were held in various, smaller venues around town. But with the new digs, everything is hosted downtown, and, while it is a beautiful space, it is a very big one – often too big for chamber music. Filling the hall even to half-capacity has been a struggle, and strategies to boost attendance have ranged from free wine for subscribers to the inclusion of visiting guests (e.g., Dudamel, Thibaudet, etc.). Sometimes it works splendidly, sometimes it doesn't.

Tuesday didn't really work. Despite the presence of guest star Eric Owens, this last show of the season fell flat. It was a grab bag of pieces with no real unifying idea. Of course not everything needs a big concept to justify its existence, but the performances here were more rocky than not, including a run-through of Schubert's "Rosamunde" string quartet and two pieces for two pianos from Reinecke and Schumann. Perhaps the biggest surprise, though, was how workman-like Owen's own performance was in JS Bach's Catata BWV 82 "Ich habe genug." While the playing was quite pretty, I didn't feel much drama here in terms of either faith or peaceful letting-go. It just was.

But, in case you're thinking it's all bad news, the [REDCAT](#) hosted the California [EAR Unit](#) ensemble downstairs at WDCH on Wednesday for a program of "premieres" all from contemporary composers who were present for the performance. They met varying degrees of success, though it must be said the players of the ensemble including Vicki Ray, Amy Knoles, Erika Duke-Kirkparick, Eric km Clark, Phil O'Connor and guest flutist Sara Andon were excellent without exception. The EAR Unit's appearances at REDCAT are a regular affair and always a special treat. The two best items of the evening ironically were not the two world premieres on the program but the pieces that had actually started their lives elsewhere. First up was [Eric Chasalow](#)'s *Trois Espace du Son* for piano and percussion with more than a handful of electronic elements. A "slow" piece about the decay of tones where, in Chasalow's own words, "different colors of attack are allowed to resonate." A particularly interesting second movement included both pianist Ray and percussionist Knoles playing the piano - the former at the keyboard and the latter on both the strings and the structure itself. It worked wonderfully and created a nice companion piece to the other highlight of the show, [John Luther Adams](#)' *The Light Within* from 2007. Here the glow of the tones is more sustained and solid. It's tempting here to draw parallels to the themes of light and the environment of Adams' own Alaskan landscape, but it seems too obvious. It's beautiful music that should be heard – let's leave it at that.

The rest of the program was silliness that I could attempt to make witty biting comments about, but this post is running long, so for everyone's sake I'll leave well enough alone.

Labels: [John Luther Adams](#), [LA Philharmonic 07/08](#), [REDCAT 07/08](#)