

**MUSIC REVIEW**

# Disciplined delirium at a concert run like a party

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The message blazoned a film screen in stern gothic type: "I am very excited to write for your crazy ensemble." The sender was German composer Wolfgang Rihm and the lunatics in question go by the name Alarm Will Sound.

The piece he sent them is confidently called "Will Sound," and it did, in vibrant blots of color, brassy gashes and crosshatchings of dissonance.

Something about this crew of 20-something masters makes composers want to write wild music. Perhaps it's their disciplined approach to delirium.

The chamber orchestra, which new music enthusiasts have been following since its core members barreled out of Eastman School of Music five years ago, staged a takeover of Zankel Hall Thursday night, rewriting music history, blowing away concert conventions, infiltrating the audience and even evicting the stagehands for most of the evening and rolling the piano themselves. A tongue-in-cheek sequence of projected photos and text offered a simultaneous counterpoint of commentary. If concert music has a future among the young, this is what it looks like.

Rather than drape a program on the usual shaky poles - nationality, chronology, ideology or a dissertation-ready theme - the group tied theirs together by personal connections. They organized the concert the way you might a dinner party, and titled it "Odd Couples." So, for instance, Frank Zappa, the devoutly eccentric rocker and late connoisseur of strangeness, never met his idol, the oracle of avant-garde music, Edgar Varèse, who died 40 years ago, but they would no doubt have liked each other if they had. Zappa's "Dog Breath Variations" has a honky-tonk humor that Varèse's "Intégrales" lacks, yet they share a noisy ebullience, all jagged rhythms and bright, wheezing sounds.

The ever-effervescent composer Derek Bermel went to Ghana to sit at the feet of Bernard Woma, a guru of the gyil, a West African xylophone, and Woma's glitteringly

intricate rhythmic patterns bore an American offspring in Bermel's foaming "Three Rivers." Sometimes the planned pairings begat new relationships. John Adams' "Coast" sounded like another mutation of the Ghanaian gene. Varèse's exuberant instrumental moans might have had a cousin in John Cale's sensually meditative "Kiss." Cale came up with this blissed-out piece for two singers and thick, Velvet-y waves of sound in 1994, but it still belongs to the era of the 1965 Andy Warhol movie it accompanies, an unromantic suite of couples tongue-fencing and lip-sucking. The puckish philosopher John Cage contributed two noteless, improvisatory pieces that the group cleverly used as cover to reset the stage.

The ensemble named itself for a warning: Don't go through that door. But under the leadership of Alan Pierson, a baby conductor of monstrous skill, the ensemble keeps merrily kicking down barriers. It includes a stage director, Nigel Maister, who sends the musicians on hikes around the hall. That sort of mobility demands total control and freedom from the music stand. Almost everyone played Varèse's meticulously chaotic masterpiece "Integrales" from memory. Now that's alarming.

ALARM WILL SOUND. Conducted by Alan Pierson. Thursday night. Zankel Hall.

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