

A Little Bit of Europe Big Enough for New York

Moving Sounds Festival at the Czech Center

By STEVE SMITH

Published: September 16, 2012

Twice on Friday night, Andreas Stadler, the director of the Austrian Cultural Forum in New York, delivered the same speech, more or less, at the Czech Center on the Upper East Side. Each time, he was welcoming an audience to a concert presented on the second night of Moving Sounds, a festival of contemporary-classical and electronic music that the forum has mounted annually since 2009.

This year's event, produced by the forum, the center, the German consulate general and the European Cultural Institutes of New York, offered three days of concerts and lectures programmed by Mr. Stadler with Michel Galante, a conductor and composer. "I'm really proud that we little European institutes managed to put such a festival on the music map here in New York," Mr. Stadler said each time, "because we look at New York as the big cultural capital of the world."

He is right to take pride in Moving Sounds, a congenial showcase for important European composers otherwise sparsely represented here. The festival also illuminates connections among American artists and their Continental counterparts. Friday's doubleheader included a New York group that focused chiefly on European pieces, and a New York composer whose program featured Swedish collaborators.



Ensemble Mise-en, a promising New York group organized by Moon Young Ha, a South Korean composer, offered a disparate set of mostly very recent pieces. Patti Kilroy, a violinist, opened with intensely focused accounts of the California composer Kurt Rohde's pensive "Night Vase" and frenetic "Obsession Toccata." Mr. Moon, joined by two pianists and a percussionist, ended the program with "noten)jahre(in Erinnerung an James Avery," a stark memorial stele by Wolfram Schurig, an Austrian composer.

What tenuously linked the works played in between these was a notion of composition as the organization of acutely distilled gestures: stabs, slurs and bell tones in Pasquale Corrado's fickle "Pulse"; tenebrous smears and feathery strokes in Bent Sorensen's "The Lady of Shalott"; brittle Webernesque shards in Elisabeth Harnik's "Reframing I." In "Illusive," a string octet, Mr. Moon evoked a difficult adjustment to New York with a wayward litany of pops, shivers and shrieks, by turns agitated and enervated.

With the evening's second concert came a sharp change of direction. Annie Gosfield, a New York composer and keyboardist, exuberantly exploits the inadvertent music of contemporary life: static, distortion, the clangor of industry and the siren song of space junk form part of her digital palette. Her four recent pieces included two from a new CD, "Almost Truths and Open Deceptions."

George Kentros, a sterling Swedish violinist, opened with "Lost Signals and Drifting Satellites," a homesick rumination further alienated by space-borne hiss and squelch, triggered by Ms. Gosfield on a notebook computer. As part of the Pearls Before Swine Experience, a seasoned Swedish new-music quartet, Mr. Kentros helped to conjure the hiss, crackle and woozy flux of old records played on a windup gramophone in "Cranks and Cactus Needles," an acoustic piece.

At the piano, Ms. Gosfield offered a new electronically accompanied piece, "Phantom Shakedown"; you could imagine the Stravinsky of "The Rite of Spring" as a saloon pianist, pounding boogie-woogie riffs in time with a broken daiquiri mixer. With the electric-guitarist Roger Kleier and the percussionist Ches Smith, Ms. Gosfield closed with "EWA7," an explosive extended work indebted to Varèse and Pink Floyd yet entirely her own in terms of originality and audacity.