

MUSIC REVIEW

The Boston Globe

A new music concert with a twist (and a slide)

By Jeremy Eichler, Globe Staff | January 25, 2010

The myriad connections between classical music and dance may often be heard but they are seldom seen. And to be sure, having tango lessons before a new music concert, dancing throughout the performance, and a milonga afterward, is not exactly an everyday occurrence on the local classical music scene.

But there it was on Friday night, an ingenious program called "Where Sound and Motion Meet," conceived and performed by the Gramercy Trio (Sharan Leventhal, violin; Jonathan Miller, cello; Randall Hodgkinson; piano). The trio commissioned five composers - Stephen Dembski, Daniel Asia, Andy Vores, Scott Wheeler, and Lee Hyla - to each write a brief work based on a dance form of their choosing. Then the choreographer Callie Chapman, artistic director of Zoé Dance, was asked to create dances for each new work, performing them with her two colleagues as the trio played each premiere.

The program took place in a studio space at Boston Conservatory and clearly its imaginativeness touched a nerve, as a large curious audience packed into the room. After a spoken introduction from Leventhal, the trio lit into Dembski's "Merengue Manic," an aggressive, fractured, and freewheeling take on the popular dance. The trio first played without the dancers and then repeated the work with them, urging audience members to think about the differences in the listening experience created by the accompanying motion.

Similar presentations followed of Asia's jazzy, insouciant "Shuffle and Blues"; Vores's thoughtfully re-imagined morris dance called "Trunkles"; Wheeler's sly, splintered tango "Touch and Go - Tango for Three"; and Hyla's "Mother Popcorn Revisited," a jagged modernist riff on two James Brown tunes. The trio tweaked the format as the evening progressed, at one point intriguingly offering the dance first without any music.

Naturally, hearing any new piece played a second time always makes a big difference. In this case, seeing it as well with dancers exteriorizing its rhythms and lines provided both new points of entry but also nudged you toward a particular interpretation of its meaning, as for instance when Chapman and colleagues (Sarah Turner and Ivan Korn) layered a comic romantic narrative on top of Wheeler's tango. In the Q and A that followed, Wheeler was asked if he had meant his piece to be so funny. No, he said, but he liked it better that way.

To cap the concert, the skilled tango dancers Martha and Pracha Eamranond joined the trio to perform Sonia Possetti's "Suite Buenos Aires," whose final movement seemed like a fond homage to Astor Piazzolla. The Gramercy's performances throughout the night had the kind of kinesthetic energy and zest that hinted at the positive feedback loop between music and dance, a relationship that is almost always implied but here made explicit as the animating idea of a delightful evening. ■