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Musicians in a whirl with Mott's Jet Stream

STEPHEN PEDERSEN Concert Review

YOU COULD WEAR OUT a thesaurus looking for the right words to describe the music made, played and written by baritone saxophonist and composer David Mott.

The piece, written for bass clarinetist Jeff Reilly and percussionist Jerry Granelli, was premiered by nine musicians in the Sonic Temple Recording Studio at the Atlantic Jazz Festival on Wednesday night.

The closest I can come to giving you any idea what Mott's Jet Stream was like, is to ask you to imagine yourself inside one of those gigantic, Great Plains tornadoes we see on TV's Storm Chasers. You know the ones that join earth to sky by way of a quarter-mile wide funnel cloud built like the Tower of Babel out of sheer, vicious turbulence that grinds and whirls and roars everything within it into toothpicks.

At the end it wasn't the floor of the studio that was littered with debris, but our minds, appalled into awed silence by the helter-skelter piles of atomized quarter notes and the broken echoes of bruised and battered instrumental timbres strewn round, still inwardly glowing with radio-active fire.

Mott's music aspires to the stars. When he went out on a space mission last September, Canadian Astronaut Steve MacLean took with him into the shuttle a recording of Eclipse, Mott's piano concerto written for Christina Petrowska Quillico and premiered at York University in March a year ago. His is undoubtedly space age music.

Jet Stream is about the intense ebbs and flows of energy detected in the jet stream to which we owe the distribution of weather systems around the globe. It began with a startling drum shot from Jerry Granelli and as he built up a series of rhythmic complexities with cymbals and small gongs and drums, the Reilly began to play a nervously acrobatic line. But long before the nearly hour-long work was finished

Mott on baritone sax, Jay Anthony Granelli on electric bass guitar, Reilly on bass clarinet and Jerry Granelli on percussion/drums formed and reformed in various solo configurations.

They formed the "concertate" solo group of a what, in formal terms, could be called a concerto grosso. The tutti ensemble consisted besides single tenor and alto saxes, two trumpets and a trombone — plenty of power here.

The solo group, never mind the ensemble, which included Dani Oore, Greg Carter, Matt Myers, Rick

Waychesko and Danny Martin, played a singular, undulating, ever varying stream of textures that, despite being unpredictable from a listener's perspective, yet carried us along by way of continual transition and transformation.

The timbres were rich and lavish. Near the end of the work a sort of soloists cadenza on the multiphonic palette of baritone sax and bass clarinet, harmonics on the bass guitar and bowed cymbal arrays of sharp-edged overtones, created an unearthly sonority that went to the heart of sound production itself, or at least to the core of what our ears make out of the natural, inner architecture of tone.

In short, an hour of fascinating textures, whirling energy, sounds from all ends of the tonal spectrum from Jay Anthony Granelli's fundamental bass tones to the extremely high pitches of the bass clarinet reed played by Reilly with immaculate expertise on the goose-neck of the instrument by itself. And through it all the unimaginably precise time-keeping and inventive percussion melodies of Jerry Granelli.

The same ensemble played two works by Jay Anthony Granelli, the Beauty and Love movements from his three-movement suite, Precious.

The combined sonority of all those bass instruments (four of them) enveloped the ear in a mantle of warm sound. Granelli's sense of line and ensemble intensified that into an absorbingly interesting musical experience.

Earlier in the evening, at The Cathedral Church of All Saints, pianist David Braid and cellist Matt Brubeck played a duet show of music from their recently released CD Twotet/Deuxtet.

This is a duo that could play the same repertoire at a classical chamber music concert and fit right in. The harmonic texture delivered by Braid with his typically sensitive touch on the piano keyboard is one of the richest of any pianist since Bill Evans.

Brubeck's soaring lyricism, driving bass lines and agile bowed improvisations merge with Braid's pianistic invention in an ideal combination. Both musicians can be heard listening to each other, since their note-choices, rhythmic insertions and general style express what each of them is hearing from the other player.

A slow work by Braid called Wash Away could pass for a lost Chopin Nocturne or prelude with its spacious lyricism, ballad-like melody and the warm, pretty classical tone of the Brubeck's cello.

Another work, enigmatically titled The Return of Dr. Spookulus (Brubeck), began somewhat in the style of Hey Big Spender, a cabaret, showbiz style with clever modulations away and back to the original key.

The only thing missing was a microphone, not for the performances, since the generous acoustics of the vaulted ceilings in the cathedral took care of that, and the musicians used them knowingly. But for introducing the tunes, it was impossible for us to hear the spoken words from beyond the second or third row.

Braid is extremely soft-spoken, and was practically inaudible. Brubeck was a little louder, but it was a still a strain to hear. Nothing that a bit of amplification could not have handled.

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