

Sound is Grammar

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Hardcore 2: the hardening

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Solistenensemble Kaleidoskop performing "Dialogue 09" at the Neues Museum, Berlin. Still hardcore.

The subtitle is my own, of course, but [Solistenensemble Kaleidoskop's](#) performance last Friday of *Hardcore 2* was, well, pretty hardcore.

The first thing you notice about *Hardcore 2* is that it features what, on paper, just looks like a hardcore *weird* programme. It went like this:

Enno Poppe: *17 Etüden für die Violine* (1993) 2. Heft

Ludwig van Beethoven: *Große Fuge*, op. 133 (1825/26) (arr. for string orchestra)

George Brecht: *Symphony No 2* (1962)

Georg Philipp Telemann: *Fantasie für Viola solo* (1735)

James Tenney: *For 12 Strings (rising)* (1971)

Henry Purcell: *Fantasia Nr 2 für 3 Streicher* (1680)

Marc Sabat: *Everlasting sweet peas für 3 Violinen* (1998) Tarantella – Saraband – Menuet – Ricercar – Anglaise – Courante

George Brecht: *Solo for Violin, Viola or Contrabass* (1962)

Iannis Xenakis: *ST/4-1,080262* (1962)

György Ligeti: *Ramifications für 12 Solostreicher* (1967–69)

The second thing you notice is that this is framed within a choreography by Aliénor Dauchez. This choreography was non-intrusive and non-illustrative, remaining more in the spirit of providing connections in space between the works, as a kind of breathing installation. For the most part this was extremely successful, although there were one or two moments that jolted me out of the immersion a bit. The most problematic of these, for me, was during Xenakis's *ST/4-1,080262*, where the entire ensemble (other than the quartet) was engaged in what appeared to be arbitrary/abstract arm gestures vaguely reminiscent of ballet (or the Village People) unfolding very slowly over time. I'm sure there must have been more to it than that, but for me this unfortunately detracted from the music, appearing, simply through proximity and juxtaposition in space, to forcibly locate therein a context for the music that simply isn't there. One of the great strengths of Xenakis's music is precisely the fact that it outright refuses to submit to its context, and it was a shame to see this boldly uncompromising music somehow pacified here.

But this is really a terribly minor gripe. On the whole the dramaturgy worked extremely well. Furthermore, such devices invite the audience to focus more closely on the pieces themselves by presenting them as essentially a single, unbroken, span of music. This prompts the audience to consider the links between different pieces on the programme, and subtly foregrounds the art of programming itself in a way that a more typical 'stand-and-play' approach does not.

And the programming here, for all its apparent weirdness, was shockingly good.

As an example, the juxtaposition of Poppe and Beethoven, as the first two pieces, was to pretty much set the scene for what was going to unfold for the rest of the night. The jarring, self-correcting, self-analytical language of Poppe's work, trying as it does to almost learn itself, to feel its way through and create meaning out of its own syntax, amplifies the almost schizophrenic thematic discourse of Beethoven's late masterpiece, while the historically-informed-practice-meets-Sex-Pistols-bravura performance of LvB rewrought it into something exhilaratingly new, something capable of contextualising (and even combatting) the twentieth century.



Also from "Dialogue 09"

Works often balanced and reinterpreted one another in surprising and remarkable ways. James Tenney's *Music for 12 strings (rising)* seemed a slightly bold departure from the sound world of the rest of the programme, only to be lovingly drawn into the fold conceptually, cognitively and aurally by the final work, Ligeti's *Ramifications*.

But such prodigious programming comes at a cost. The most recent work on the programme was Sabat's, written in 1998, and it's difficult to imagine such a perfect balance arising from a concert featuring

multiple world premières, where the unknowability of the precise qualities of the works involved beforehand is such a factor in programming balance.

And so onto the playing itself. These guys played the *shit* out of this repertoire. The playing was an utterly bewitching combination of passion, precision, energy, wit, daring and, perhaps most importantly, a deep love for the music. Kaleidoskop, as ensemble and as a collection of soloists, displays a deep sensitivity and commitment to this music that was an utter pleasure to behold.

It's hard to pinpoint with precision exactly what was hardcore about this concert. Maybe it was the bold combination of old and new, and its subsequent transformation into the Very New. Maybe it was level of player commitment, which rolled over the audience in palpable waves. Maybe it was the dramaturgical installation-ness of it. But I suspect that hardcoritude is something a bit more indefinable.

Solistenensemble Kaleidoskop are hardcore in the [Jarvis Cocker](#) sense – you may not be able to tell exactly *why* it's hardcore, but you're 100% certain that it *is*.

Videos of previous Kaleidoskop performances (including the original *Hardcore*) are available on [Kaleidoskop TV](#).

EDIT: Just stumbled across this [interesting, if brief, interview](#) with the Kaleidoskop's artistic director Michael Rauter, and managing director Volker Hormann (in German).

Posted by robertdahm

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