

The Boston Musical Intelligencer

*a virtual journal and essential blog of the classical music scene in
greater Boston*

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FEBRUARY 7, 2025

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Berklee Composers at Seully Hall

by MARK DeVOTO

Enthusiastic students and fellow faculty gathered in gratifying numbers on Tuesday night to hear an easygoing concert of new pieces, including several premieres. Seully Hall proved acoustically satisfying for the short-winded chamber music and piano solos which dominated the concert.

Dennis Leclair's "Rumpelstiltskin," the first of his *Three Fairy Tales* for horn and piano, led off with bumpy low-register ostinato patterns and a cute upper-register tweet at the end.

Pianist Yuseok Seol took us on a quiet, careful walk through Marti Epstein's *Hummingbirds*; its high and very low layers alternated in two-part counterpoint that began chromatic and dissolved into gentle A minor – C major... nice.

Apostolos Paraskevas played his own *Escape* for guitar with acute and even dramatic sensitivity, regularly returning to the open bass E-string and dodging in the upper register with fast chromatic fingerwork and bell-like harmonics.

Composer Andrew List spent quite a while getting a big piano piece, *Le Pont Universel*, out of the gate, with booming Brahms-like chords alternating with quiet, complex two-part counterpoint up and down the instrument, and varying the scene with glisses and a postlude of well-regulated trills. Stephen Porter projected the sounds with eloquence and attractiveness, although it seemed too lengthy.

Margaret McAllister offered six Celtic pieces, *Meòmhrachd Fadhain Tir* (Contemplations on a Wild Land) for unaccompanied violin, beautifully

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executed by Krista Reisner, with ruffed sleeves. In sections like “Crossing the Void,” “Mountain Stream,” “Wild Deer,” “Mystic Land,” “Skylark,” and “Ancient Mountain,” airy, outdoorsy feel was palpable, with sweet upper-register melody, recurrent open strings, and bouncy double-stop bowing here and there, and a good deal of expressive 6/8. At the very end, several quiet pizzicati spoke the last word.

Another substantial, though not exactly substantive, piano piece was Ryan Suleiman’s Etude No. 1: *Radiant*. For about four minutes, Sakurako Kanemitsu delivered much-repeated broken chords in the Philip Glass manner, and a few brittle upper-register sounds.

Three songs by Larry Bell from a cycle, *Prism of the Lyre*, with texts by Mary Collins, featured Alecia Batson, soprano, and the composer at the piano. Bell’s Schubertian tonal idiom, varied from time to time with a French harmonic flavor, supported the warmly somnolent poetry in perfect balance, and I have always liked his sound; the audience agreed totally, cheering the wrapup of an hour’s program.

Margaret McAllister was good enough to give me, before the concert, a printed listing of all the complex titles of her six pieces. The remainder of the program was available only by clicking on a QR code, and it disappeared from my mobile phone immediately after the concert, with the result that I can’t tell you more about the performers, nor information that I might have written down in the darkness of the hall. The electronic bill of fare announced that 130 sheets of paper, 14 gallons of water, and 12 pounds of carbon dioxide were

thereby saved as a result of a fatuous policy of “green” programming, which I have scorned before at NEC in these pages.

Mark DeVoto, musicologist and composer, is an expert on the music of Alban Berg, Debussy, and other early 20th-century composers. A graduate of Harvard College (1961) and Princeton (Ph.D., 1967), he has published on many music subjects, and edited the revised fourth (1978) and fifth (1987) editions of *Harmony* by his teacher Walter Piston.

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