There’s No Place Like Home
sfSound Group @ ODC

It was easy to enjoy the recent sfSound concert at ODC in the good old Mission District of San Francisco (especially pleasant that a few gems from a once plentiful crop of arts spaces weren’t ground to powder during the good ole’ dot.com blunder). The producers of the series (David Bithell, Chris Burns, Matt Ingalls, and Chris Jones) have put a lot of energy into this series and anyone with even a lump of gray tissue between their ears will be pleased to learn that the effort has earned them a new home at ODC Theater. Ingalls mumbled plaintively that ODC will likely move in a year (to a larger and nearby nest). One might dream that ODC will remember to bring sfSound along for the ride – the new space has the makings of an even finer performing arts complex. Audience: Snap out of that trendy complacency immediately and let ODC know it’s the right stuff to retain sfSound in their little shop of horrors! Shout at them directly through your telephone device, or try lurking near the ticket counter and pass notes to them at upcoming shows.

I imagined while driving through the pouring rain on a Monday night that the audience would be slight, but there was a near full box of glamorous misfits milling about the place. The evening opened with a performance of John Cage’s Imaginary Landscape no. 1 (’93). This most satisfying effort of suppressed sound was realized on piano (Christopher Jones), percussion (Russell Greenberg) and electronics (Christopher Burns) (electronics originally composed for “record player” – how peanut butter and jelly is that?). The performance was appropriately drier than an above-average Pinot Grigio and equally tasty in all its visionary brilliance (would there be a “new” reductionist movement if Cage had not opened the door?). Landscape comes from his early pieces for percussion, which helped to define a medium slice of his stylistic aesthetics by removing expressive qualities while retaining formal substance through the proliferation of rhythm. Diabolically opposed to his more emotive works of the same period, there was an urge in these sketches to erase the sonic trail leading back to the 10th century. The trio admirably squeezed great slices of citric sound from the score, which emerged into the evening’s program with a clear and concise opening statement.

It is possible that Christopher Jones’ transcription shilliphed one too many sparklers from the timbral spectrum that illuminates Anton Webern’s miraculous 5 Pieces for Orchestra. (Students: was it Jones’ intent that his arrangement echo the minimalist concerns Cage played with in his Imaginary Landscape?) On the other hand, the quartet’s luminous performance revealed Webern’s musical brilliance in all its meticulous innocence. The reluctant Second Viennese Schoolmaster’s work is never easy to realize, and it is a worthy testament to Kyle Bruckmann (oboe & English horn), Matt Ingalls (clarinet), Christopher Jones (piano) and Russell Greenberg (percussion) that they employed a stable performance of this particularly thorny work on what I’m sure was an impossibly narrow rehearsal path.

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My favorite episode was a new work by Anthony Braxton (Composition #1). I could have listened to the whole thing, which would have taken an hour before springing the irresistible open sections on an impossibly patient audience. Composition #1 is a familiar yet terrifying tightrope routine of rhythm and intervallic eruption that has graced Braxton’s late work. The improvising and on the spot arrangement strategies were effective, offering everyone lots of space to invent and infect, and the ensemble’s sound fabric had an ample supply of sumptuously evil textures. It was chaotic at times, but never so dense that you couldn’t pull out any of the strands and examine them. A double-Dutch legion of props to David Arend (bass), Bruckmann, Ingalls, Greenberg, John Ingle (saxophone), Jones, Toyoyo Tomita (tritone), John Shiurba (electric guitar), and Erik Ulman (violin) for a fun-house full of trap doors, geeky buzzers, flashing colors, extended technique whoopee cushions, and scary sound monsters.

The performance of the extended work Lumen was most pleasurable on every account. Composer & choreographer David Bithell achieved a great deal of mileage from simple visual/sound motifs, and it all moved admirably forward with a fresh breeze of humor that took the audience captive and nuzzled them into submission. The live music interacted with the taped music about as seamlessly as you could possibly expect. All was beautifully sounded throughout the space. And lo and behold: a flock of clever gadgets floated all about the place and repeatedly stole the show. Oversized gloves and a host of associated icons floated on the air and insulted, teased, and aggravated a trumpet, a composer, his (and others) shadow(s), and many a clever cue card. Information drifted through the experience like junky hummingsbirds – gamelan vibrations soothed the receptors and urged the audience to trancelike their way through a uniquely sparse surrealist landscape. Yumsky, yumsky!

— Phillip Greenlief

Jon Raskin continued

Goldberg’s lovely piece “Evaporate”, rendered on alto. This was a moody rumination among disparate intervals, and strategically an emotional bookend to the bittersweet of the piece opening the concert.

Raskin closed not with the programmed improvisation, but with Ornette Coleman’s down home hoedown “Ramblin” done on soprano and dedicated to the late Steve Lacy. His baritone sized wind engine easily filled out the bottom of the tiny horn, making a convincing portrait of the iconoclastic icon of the larger Eb soprano. I really appreciated how he found ways to play Ornette’s tune with Lacy’s methods, another great idea I’ve never thought of. After nailing Lacy so well, I was actually relieved when Jon’s left hand got hung up momentarily in the tricky out head. Everything else in the preceding hours had been executed flawlessly, which can raise some doubts about the humanity of your subject. It being Ornette (after all), performance variations of this sort do not stop the show, and Raskin went on to completely blow right through the horn and out into the cosmos for his coda, visiting circular breathing sheets-of-sound from another soprano icon, to end on a very bright, high note.

— Dave Slusser

This was the real deal, folks. Anyone attempting a tour de force should look no further for where the bar is set. Jon Raskin’s solo performance was incredibly well prepared, well thought out, and well delivered. Find out more about the series at: http://trinitychamberconcerts.com

Jon Raskin, solo at Trinity Chapel
1/15/04

For the benefit of our wider readership, Jon Raskin is the guy that’s put the IT in the ROVA saxophone quartet for the past 28 years. The exceptional longevity and originality of the venerated ensemble sometimes makes it hard to separate the group and the player. This solo performance, as part of Berkeley’s Trinity Chamber Concert Series, gave air to Jon, the individual. When I was inevitably reminded of ROVA at points, it was as gentle insights into his contributions, grand and subtle, to one of my all time favorite groups.

The concert series, now in its 31st year, is managed by flautist Diane Glubbe, and coordinated by Ryk Groetchen. One block off the UC campus, it’s presented in an airy, vaulted chapel on the grounds of the Trinity United Methodist Church. I enjoy the reverberant sound of music in chapels, though it can sink some instruments. Raskin stayed well in front of his echoes, but on faster pieces, they do become a presence in the music. This is not necessarily a bad thing for a wind soloist, and from the first piece, Jon got the measure of the room. His program consisted of compositions for improviser (by Anthony Braxton, Ben Goldberg and himself) interspersed with improvisations of the moment. It was also incredibly well paced in its moods and instrumentation.

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improvised pieces on jaw harps from his collection. Commonly called “Ives’ Harp” in our enlightened culture, they’re found all around the world, and as Jon pointed out, you get to deal with music in the terms of the earliest people to play. These specimens from Rajastan, Hungary, South China and Siberia all shared the aspect of a narrow metal tube plucked over the open mouth cavity, modulated most of the time by a focused column of air blown over the vibrating tube. It’s similar to Tuvan throat singing with the shaping of oral resonance and its play of overtones. The plucking gave a nice rhythmic lift to the evening, with occasional effects with the lips and air adding accents. It’s a truly weird and wonderful sound, sometimes voice-like, capable of articulating words, then again, eerily electronic. Jaded ears can do well by hearing how large some folk music of the world deals in sound.

It was at intermission that I began to realize what an ambitious undertaking two solo sets must be. I’m ready to go running from the stage after only 10 minutes. Clearly Raskin can count programming among his many skills. The distribution of methods and instrumentation maximized contrasts and minimized fatigue for both performer and audience.

The second set began with Jon’s Graphic Notation Suite, music for improvisers, “inspired by the graphic language of Wassily Kandinsky” according to the program notes. We were treated to “Lines Paths & Fields”, “Note Patterns and Lines”, and “Movement Graphics” as audible music, but not shown the graphic scores. I think Raskin’s work in this area deserves further exploration, because he delivered such deliberate and focused accounts of what he was looking at. It may not be relevant for the listener to see it, and in fact, the composer might prefer that we don’t. The notation is written to get a result. The composer wants us to experience the result, not second guess the performer’s interpretation of the funny lines and squiggles. Playing his pliant alto on all three, Raskin sold it with his studied intent. As in purely improvised pieces, the mere presence of intention goes a long way to making it compelling and convincing.

The next two pieces were compositions for improvisation by two reed players. He introduced “40(0)” by Anthony Braxton (an acknowledged influence and someone he’s recorded with), mentioning first hearing it 25 years ago in North Berkeley at a club called Mapenzi. Truly an incredible spot, Mapenzi was actually on Adeline between where the Jazzhouse was and Alcatraz, and yes, I was there. Jon did it on soprano, his enjoyment of playing the piece clear in his sprightly, rolling treatment. Once again I pondered the nature of just how much is really written in a piece of this nature, and had to accept the clearly coherent result as a moot point. Following was Ben

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Jon Raskin continued
He opened on baritone sax, the large horn you see him anchoring so much of ROVA’s work with, announcing that all of his improvised pieces throughout the evening would be linked as studies in time. I took his word for it and just listened, as melodious long toned waves of sound swept the room; in some wistful Luciani or Phrygian mode at times. I was immediately reminded of Ghandarva, a spacey Beaver & Krause record that had baritoneist Gerry Mulligan playing the same way in Grace Cathedral around 1970. Raskin’s tone, of course, is much less burry, tighter, like a tenor, but this is a guy that can get as burry as a buzz saw, so I knew he was setting us up for the contrasts to come.

Switching to alto, which he’s also performed incredibly on over the years, he presented his own composition for improvisers that itself was a study in contrasts. Written for a trio of saxists Frank Gratowski, Phillip Greenleaf and himself, it holds the players to accompany each other in distinctly different methods of playing, section by section. Jon played it as one of the three players. This was a great showcase for his immense vocabulary and instrumental control, as well as the self discipline to lay out a well ordered, coherent set of changes. Now he had presented more challenging material, but in a form most lay people could follow and be entertained by.

Third piece, back to baritone for an improvisation, and this time he pulled no punches. Starting jazzy and jaunty, he took on more crazed abandon and unleashed growls, ticks, sighs, blaps, and staccato slap tonguing in great dynamic array, at one point sounding like a drummer working out with brushes on a snare. He came pretty close to playing bass, melody and percussion all at once, but this was not to be a Charlie Hunter circus piece.

The very next thing Raskin did was to literally accompany himself, though. He had pre-recorded three short improvised pieces to improvise against live. Starting on the tiny, straight Eb soprano sax, he intertwined and dovetailed with a disembodied twin. This was the best of the three, and it should be noted what absolute wind power the lower horns give a player on the sopranos. A duet for altos, and one for baritones followed, but the difference in the canned sound was too apparent not to bring a distracting karaoke aspect. The baritone piece was a good concept in subtle shading and rigorously performed, though. One solution would be to run the live horn through the same amplification rig.

As his break piece for intermission, and yet another mindful effort of programming, Jon revealed the fruits of what started as a hobby a few years ago. He did five astonishing short

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Week 2/2 8:00 PM free Knuth Hall, SFSU [Knuth Hall, Creative Arts Bldg SF SU campus, 19th Ave & Holloway, SF]
The Empyrean Ensemble, purveyors of new American music, presents “Fault Lines: Music from Northern California.”

Thu 2/3 8:00 PM $5-10 sliding scale Luggage Store Gallery New Music Series [1007 Market St. @ 6th Street SF]
8pm: Twen (Dona Carroll: electric cello & Tom Nunn: inventions)
9pm: Lindsay/Baker/Norden/Smith quartet
(Clarinet/Trombone/Percussion/Doubled-bass)
Fri 2/4 8:00 PM Herbst Theatre [Van Ness and McAllister SF]
Four Seasons is presenting THOMAS BUCKNER, baritone, in a new program of works by David Darling, Annea Lockwood, “Blue” Gene Tyranny and Petek Kotik
Sat 2/5 8:00 PM 3M New Langton Arts [1246 Folsom Street SF]
Composer Aila Vastokka, violin (Boston) with Bryan Eubanks, soprano saxophone (Portland)
Sat 2/5 8:00 PM 5Mills College Concert Hall [5000 MacArthur Blvd Oakland]
ELIANE RADIGUE - This pioneering French composer of electroacoustic music envisions the listener with her unique, meditatively crafted world of sound.
Sat 2/5 9:30 PM $5-15 sliding scale LoBog Gallery [1800 Campbell St. (not near BART) Oakland]
21 Grand benefit at LoBog Gallery: subtle, Cat Five, Kitundu, Borful Tang, teleiphone/imsus
Mon 2/7 7:30 PM Mills College Ensemble Room [5000 MacArthur Blvd Oakland]
!!!!!CANCELLED!!!!!! - BIGGI VINKELO
Wed 2/9 8:00 PM suggested donation $10 Meridian Gallery [545 Sutter Street SF]
Meridian Music presents composer/performer (violinist) Indra Cocks
Wed 2/9 8:00 PM $1210th St Performance Space [1510 8th Street SF]
Chaotic Butterfly with special guests Diana Emmer and Jonathan Seel and CHAOS BUTTERFLY, a new music duo working between improvisation and composition, utilizing computers, voices, violin, wine glasses, etc.
Thu 2/10 8:00 PM $5-10 sliding scale Luggage Store Gallery New Music Series [1007 Market St. @ 6th Street SF]
8pm Bob March, whoknowswhat/Brian Eubanks (Portland, OR), saxes and stuff
9pm Stuart Hinds, solo overtone vocalist (Lubbock, TX)
Thu 2/10 8:30 PM $12 Exploratorium [3601 Lyon St. San Francisco, CA 94123]
Come to the Exploratorium and hear Matmos, a musical group famous for creating sound symphonies using an edifice array of gathered sound.
Fri 2/11 9:00 PM Cafe Rite Spot [17th St. @ Folsom in SF Mission]
Miss Henry: vocals, Ralph Probst-guitar, Steve Fowler-bass
Sat 2/12 8:00 PM $10 Sonoma Arts Cultural Center [SOMARTS, 934 Brannan Street (between 8th and 9th), San Francisco]
32five incorporated proudly presents the Eighth Annual Activating the Medium, This year’s festival brings together a reunion of early pioneers of “American Noise” including CHOP SHOP (NY), THE HATERS (SF), AMK (LA), and BLACKHOUND (WA).
Thu 2/17 8:00 PM $5-10 sliding scale Luggage Store Gallery New Music Series [1007 Market St. @ 6th Street SF]
8pm Wayne Girard: solo guitar
9pm Stephen Flinn/Naoh Phillips Duo drums/electric guitar
Sun 2/12 12:00 AM $5-10 sliding scale 1510 St Performance Space [510 8th Street Oakland]
Pianist Achim Kaufman - solo (Amsterdam, Netherlands) and trio w/ Philip Greenlief and Kami Bolar (Oakland,CA, Walnut Creek, CA)
Sun 2/20 8:00 PM $5,50,510 SIMM Series/Outsider Research [Musicians Union Hall 116 9th St @ Mission SF]
Thu 2/24 7:30 PM FREE Mills College Ensemble Room [5000 MacArthur Blvd, Oakland, CA 94613]
Beth Custer performs a solo set of original songs and improvisations on Bb, alto, and bass clarinets as well as piano, voice, and trinkets.
Thu 2/24 8:00 PM $5-10 Luggage Store Gallery New Music Series [1007 Market St. @ 6th Street SF]
8pm CKW Trio + Photo Mihkhle
Sun 2/27 7:30 PM $10 General, $9 Students/Students, $5 BAC Members Berkeley Art Center [1275 Walnut Berkeley, CA 94709]
The One-Night LifeMinds Festival by Gray Code (Jon Mats, Tom Bickley, Joe Zitt) - electroacoustic conversations about current events, musical and otherwise.
Mon 2/28 8:00 PM $5/10 QDC Dance Theatre [3153 17th St @ Potrero SF]
{iSoun Series} A survey of thirty-five years of new compositions from Germany, including Karlheinz Stockhausen’s “Kurzelwells”
MARCH 2005
Thu 3/3 8:00 PM $5-10 sliding scale Luggage Store Gallery New Music Series [1007 Market St. @ 6th Street SF]
Field recordings, laptop processing, prepared instruments, room acoustics, noise, electronics, sounds Environment
8pm: Jutino (Jorge Badmann) 9pm: Jeff Gubric
from March 4-10:
Friday 4/14 8:00 PM 5Mills College Concert Hall [5000 MacArthur Blvd Oakland]
Matthias Spahringer 126renlle-Augmenterie
Cornelis Lachenmann Toccata
Olga Neuwirth Guassar-Pulvara
Philippe Brun Collaboration
ODC Theater 3153 17th Street (at Shattil) SF admission $12 ($10 student)
6:30pm: 126 renlle-Augmenterie (Lachenmann)
7:30pm 126 renlle-Augmenterie (Neuwirth)
www.siSound.org/sound_series/siSound.org

VANDER Presents:
Monday, February 7th - 8pm
Imaginacapa plays 21 Grand Benefit @ 21 Grand
849 2nd Street (between Telegraph & Broadway) Oakland
Admission: $8 - 10pm sliding scale
Imaginacap is a weekly variety show that hosts a wide range of local talent each week. This week we feature the following acts: Ethan Starks, Lucy Quinlan, Andrew Lewis, Morgan Miller, and the new Imaginacaps. Imaginacap is a fun way to support local artists in the Bay Area. It's free and open to the public.
Sunday, February 7th - 8pm
(from Amsterdam, NL) Pianist Achim Kaufman
Achim Kaufman trio, with Philip Greenlief on reeds, and Michael Manasse on percussion
1110 8th Street Performance Space
For more information on these events and more, go to www.musiciansunion.com

SUNDAY, MARCH 4TH at 7:30PM
Benefit for the Bay Area Experimental Music Community

FROM 2/19 TO 6/19:
EXPLORATORIUM: EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC:
Saturday, February 19th, 3pm
LEACOCK GALLERY:
SERIES/OUTSIDER RESEARCH: FOR THE CHAPEL CHAMBERS
Thursday, February 24th, 8pm
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26TH:
MARCH 2005:

Albuquerque, NM
Sat 3/5 8:00 PM $12 General, $8 Student; Disabled; Student Trinity Chamber Concerts (Trinity Chapel, 2320 Dana St San Bruno Bank &
Durant Berkeley)
For this concert, Brassosaurus premieres works by Chris Brown and Wendy Reid as well as original pieces by the group
Sun 3/6 7:30 PM $5,50,510 SIMM Series/Outsider Research [Musicians Union Hall 116 9th St @ Mission SF]
TBA
Wed 3/9 8:00 PM suggested donation $10 Meridian Gallery [545 Sutter Street SF]
Meridian Music presents a noted composer/performer tba
Thu 3/10 8:00 PM $5-10 Luggage Store Gallery New Music Series [1007 Market St. @ 6th Street SF]
A night with Tokyo Nammy Tokyo Nammy - electro voice Fred Frith - elektr guitars and more TBA

FOR MORE INFO: TRAMPS-CALENDAR.ORG FOR DETAILS ABOUT THESE EVENTS, PLEASE check the sidebar and INDEX to SUBMISSION GUIDELINES.