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Norske hvislelyde og færøske strandskader

Norwegian hissing sounds and Faroese beach damage

Selection translated:

the annual ISCM festival is a global gathering of contemporary composers. This is how you can describe the festival, also known as World New Music Days.

The festival is organized by the International Society for Contemporary Music and takes place in a new part on the globe every year. It has been this way since the beginning in 1923, and over the years composers such as Carl Nielsen, Béla Bartók, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Per Nørgård have had their new works presented at the ISCM festivals. Every time has its own new music.

This year the festival takes place in the Faroe Islands. The program consists of the selection of hundreds of submitted works from all ISCM member countries, as well as individual submissions resulting in a large and very varied festival program. Everything from electroacoustic music, virtuoso solo works, sculptural sound installations, gentle minimal melodies, enigmatic

performative performances and raw modernism, where the works tear themselves to pieces. There are 140 works in a range so wide that it makes the most sense if you go to as many as possible of the over 30 concerts.

Awaited with excitement up here were two concerts with the Lapland Chamber Orchestra. A world-class Finnish orchestra specializing in contemporary music. There is no Faroese orchestra that can solve the tasks that the Lapland Chamber Orchestra was given at this year's festival, and perhaps there is no other orchestra in the Nordics that would be able to perform 13 new works within 24 hours - and play it all with total commitment.

Their first concert consisted of works for string orchestra. Eric Egan from Norway began by surrounding the audience with 14 individual string voices that longingly reached out to each other yet remained lonely in the work 'in one or another Oase'.

After the Norwegian hissing sounds, the dynamics were turned up by the Serbian composer Natasha Bogojevic. She was born in 1966 and thus in the mature section at a festival where many composers are around 30 years old. With the piece 'Dissolvenza', Bogojevic showed what rock-solid compositional technique can do for the dramaturgy of music. The work was eminently well instrumented with full orchestral depth. In ferocity, it was then topped by Polish Maciej Kabza's hair-raising piece 'The Infinity Mirror II',

where the orchestra's charismatic cellist Lauri Angervo was the whip side by side with the glowing conductor John Storgårds.

The concert ended with '1000 Mouths' by Raimonda Žiūkaitė (b. 1991), Lithuanian composer with blue hair and dragon's claws on his coat hood, who succeeded in fully realizing his original sonorous visions for something as old-fashioned as a classical string orchestra. In this way we were led from earthly solitude to a new, unexplored universe. Quite simply an excellent concert.

Less intense was the concert the following day, when the orchestra was in full formation with strings, winds and piano. The youngest of the composers did not get to unfold the possibilities of the larger and more demanding crew - Slovak Haimoni Balgava (b. 1994) and her symphonic landscape poem 'Carpathian timbre' succeeded best. A different grasp of the format was shown by the festival's leader, composer Sunleif Rasmussen, who transformed the sound of Faroese beach injuries and blackheads into a refined, bizarre nature concert in 'Chorals and Dances', while his senior colleague Kristian Blak let the angular silhouette of the island of Mykines be the starting point for his booming piece 'úr Holminum'.

A special case was the composer Victoria Frances Young from the USA, born in the year 2000, and one of the quite a few participants who had signed up individually for the festival's open call. That such a young composer can

present a characterful piano concerto that is both precise and compelling is an expression of a special talent. Besides getting on the program, it was her great luck to get into the arms of the Finnish orchestra and pianist Anna Laakso, who is a reactor of musical energy. The performance was super focused.

There is a good rule of thumb which says that music is no better than it is played – and at the two ISCM concerts the Finnish orchestra showed what can be achieved with the combination of virtuosity, idealism and artistic presence. As ambassadors for today's music, the orchestra simply has the quality of making completely new works appear as ones that should naturally be played again soon.

Jens Cornelius