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'The Tonight Show' hosts through the years



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Great Noise, with some hitches

By Cecelia Porter, Published: January 22, 2012

Collaborating with the Society of Composers and Great Noise Ensemble, Catholic University took on an ambitious project Friday and Saturday, sponsoring a festival of new vocal music that covered a lot of territory. The event included four concerts of music ranging from cabaret and art songs to sacred music and chamber works. On Saturday night, Great Noise Ensemble, the school's resident instrumental group, joined with young singers at Ward Recital Hall to offer a capacity audience seven works dating from the past three years.

An adventuresome ensemble focusing on emerging talents, Great Noise has deservedly won a solid place on Washington's new music scene. But for Saturday's performance, both the scores themselves and the performers were placed at a distinct disadvantage. Although all but one of the works had English texts, only a scattered word or phrase was understandable, as is frequently the situation in vocal concerts. The problem vanishes when words are provided in the program. This was not the case Saturday night. In addition, the audience was literally left completely in the dark, making it impossible to follow which compositions were by what composer.



I was left with only impressions of the music, which I heard on the whole as somewhat neo-modernist, contemporary with the recent waves of neo-romanticism that plunge back into 19th-century tonality and plush textures. Many of Saturday's scores seem to resuscitate the angular melodies and stark, pungent atonal tone clusters of Arnold Schoenberg and his Second Viennese School.

One of the most effective compositions was Julia Adolphe's "I Felt a Cleaving," a setting of Emily Dickinson's concentrated, minimalist poetic language. Soprano Lisa Perry and mezzo Sonya Alexandra Knussen delivered a confident, penetrating account



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(Julia Adolphe) - Composer Julia Adolphe.

of lines closely entwined, then gradually breaking apart and melting into the instrumental texture. Paul Osterfield's "Animal Crackers" is a dryly amusing sequence of character pieces, often in racy dance style, portrayed imaginatively by tenor John Williams and coupled with the consummate skill and tonal beauty of Heidi Littman on the French horn.

Porter is a freelance writer.



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