

## Players reach for heaven in captivating concert

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### CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEW

#### Cleveland Contemporary Players

An ecstatic song cycle and a wordless chamber-music drama capped the outstanding concert presented by the Cleveland Contemporary Players Tuesday night at Cleveland State University's Drinko Recital Hall.

Cleveland-born composer James Primosch drew texts from the writings of three 20th-century American women and a seventh century Sinai desert monk for his luminous songs, "Holy the Firm." The poetic words are sensitively matched to music that evokes images of fire, Jacob's ladder, an everyday god and deathbed sensations. The vocalist frequently sings in a high range, and the piano part, too, reaches toward the heavens. Soprano Tony Arnold drew listeners into the score's rapturous atmosphere with singing of tonal beauty and dramatic truth. Pianist Jacob Greenberg played his collaborative role with clarity.

Composer Michael Colgrass cast three instrumentalists as strong-willed individuals in his dramatic play-without-words, "Strangers: Irreconcilable Variations." Each player inhabited a separate sonic sphere and developed different themes. Yet, they shared musical ideas and took cues from one another within an expansive structure. The intriguing work was expertly performed by the Venner Trio (clarinetist Theodore Johnson, violist Arthur Klima and pianist Eric Ziolek).

The evening's most stunning performance was given by trumpet virtuoso Jon Nelson, who played Luciano Berio's *Sequenza X* with brilliant mastery of difficult contemporary techniques. The imaginative score requires unconventional trills and tremolos plus varied methods of hand-muting and tonguing. The soloist also activates sympathetic piano string vibrations by blowing tones into the soundboard as an assistant (pianist Greenberg) silently depresses keys and pedals.

Nelson also gave a lyrical performance of Morton Feldman's "A Very Short Piece for Trumpet" and an energetic interpretation of Jeffrey Stadelman's "Mr. Natural" with the assistance of Greenberg, who also played George Benjamin's austere piano solo, "Shadowlines."

The program as a whole testified to the high standards music director Andrew Rindfleisch set for the organization that succeeded the Cleveland Chamber Symphony as CSU's resident ensemble specializing in serious music by living composers.

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