

## ALL THAT GLITTERS, GROWLS AND ROARS

Speak Percussion [Eugene Ughetti, Peter Neville, Matthias Shack-Arnott, Leah Purcell]

10<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert,

Band Room, ANU, Sept 22

Reviewer: Zsuzsi Soboslay

425 words

Contemporary percussion repertoire continually surprises—especially when it runs the gamut from its ancient, tribal origins, through to electronic interactions. This week's concert by Melbourne group *Speak Percussion* reflected the fine intelligence of the group's programming and its ongoing mentoring of process and both Australian and international composers.

If music could glisten, then Speaks' performance of Warren Burt's quartet, *Vibraphone and tuning forks*, achieves just that. Eugene Ughetti plays an elegant vibraphone against 39 micro-tonally tuned, hand-held aluminium tuning forks, struck one by one and then hovered in their sounding space. This is a dance of fireflies. The piece is a delicate interplay between alternate tuning systems--the tempered vibraphone against the forks' 'just' intonations. A magician's dance, my ears are folded from starburst into a dark cave and back again. The performance is delicate and exciting,

James Rushford's piece *Lucas Stumbles* also travels through a varying sound- and land-scape, from a rat's-toe scatter across drum membrane, through low rumbles deep within sound bores, to sudden gasps of silence.

Conlon Nanacarrow's brief *Player Piano Study* was here arranged for 3 keyboards, each playing in different rhythmic structures [21 beats against 24 against 25]. I see/hear wind ruffling across desert sands. Sometimes I've watched children in a playroom also carrying such disparate rhythms. [They too can suddenly stop playing, at the same time.]

In *Hypnogogics*, composer Antony Pateras rolls out a background tape in one long tone which keeps rising. Ughetti works within a contained space [the width of his body], tripping mallets over a collection of tiny Turkish coffee glasses, ceramic bowls, steel rods, wood blocks, and crotales [small, tuned brass disks]. The crotales, sounding two octaves higher than seems possible, sound the splinterings of a mind only half-awake.

Pertout's *Exposiciones* for solo glockenspiel and tape is an intelligent transposition by Peter Neville from an original score for toy piano. Neville recognised correspondences of tuning, rhythms and micro-tonalities. The click-tape [a computer-generated backing tape, which here marks time in tripping, alternating signatures] acts as a tabla-like ground. Pertout has elsewhere written for the 100-stringed santour; here, his understanding of Indian tonalities shines, but with a Western edge. The performance is sparkling, glittering, invigorating.

On a line of wood-blocks, Fritz Hauser's quartet recreates the combination of joy and irritation one experiences on a hot night, overwhelmed by cicadas. Mesmerised by the piece's subtle shifts of rhythm, we laugh at sudden moments of quiet, punctuated by an elegant page turn. Theatrical and gracious, this piece is an homage to the complex vivacity of the insect world.

*SPEAK performed as part of their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert tour, also conducting master classes at the ANU. They are offering mentorships to young percussion players and composers. For further information, go to [www.speakpercussion.com.au](http://www.speakpercussion.com.au).*