

Standing Wave: Concert 4
Sunday, June 10, 2001
Vancouver East Cultural
Centre

One of the strengths of Vancouver's Standing Wave ensemble is their eagerness to take risks, and in this final concert of the 2000/2001 season they challenged both themselves and the audience, leading the way into uncharted territories of music-making.

Tigida Pipa, by American composer Stephen Montague, was a percussion quartet for voices, a ritualistic study of rhythm in chanted nonsense syllables, tongue trills, shouts, and whistles. Primitive fertility rites were brought to mind, in an ironic sense, when the only recognizable text was "Boom-Chikka, Oh Baby," but the energetic performance got us revved up for the rest of the show.

Guest trombonist Jeremy Berkman joined clarinetist François Houle on *Solo pour deux*, by French composer Gerard Grisey. This composition unified the duo into a single instrument, exploring timbral and acoustic relationships with techniques taken from electronic music. The basic tone of each wind instrument was modified: by an array of mutes for the trombone, multiphonics from the clarinet, and vocalizations from both players. From a computer, the sounds would have had a certain intellectual attraction, but as realized by live musicians the demanding performance gained an athletic intensity.

The centrepiece of the concert was Vancouver composer Bradshaw Pack's *palladia*, commissioned through the patronage of the Acoustic Panel. This work tested the virtuosity of the ensemble, and the attention of the audience, with complex rhythmic interactions, aggressive scalar gestures, and

unexpected tonal preparations. The intense restlessness of the music gave the image of a caged beast, beautiful and powerful, but a danger to its captors. The ensemble gave a stunning and passionate first performance of a composition that was not for the faint-of-heart, in particular the bold string playing of Laura McPheeters, cello, and Sheila McDonald, violin.

More unusual tone colours were explored in *Ein modernes Kaufhaus*, by Canadian composer Marc Sabat, a work of fascinating simplicity. A muted piano ostinato underlay the three movements of this surreal piece, a dry, percussive sound that seemed to filter the notes through glass or wood. Isolated tones and clipped chords appeared as fragmented memories of melody and harmony, and an unpredictably rhythmic melody in an exotic mode reinforced feelings of isolation in an alien landscape. A little shaky in performance, the piece nevertheless held together on the clarity and confidence of its structure.

The second world premiere of the evening was Vancouver composer David MacIntyre's *Intimate Letters*, commissioned for trombone soloist Jeremy Berkman. MacIntyre revealed himself as a sentimental romantic in music that would not have been out of place as the soundtrack to a Gallic *affaire de coeur*. Berkman's controlled lyricism saved the piece from too much heart-on-sleeve, and a haunting moment of inspired orchestration was displayed as the trombonist sang and played a duet with himself over a bed of violin harmonics. With the strength of Standing Wave's musicality, even a love song has its place in a new music concert.