Events

Voices: Peninsula Arts Contemporary Music Festival

Reviewed by Nigel Morgan
Wakefield, West Yorkshire, UK

The South West peninsula of the United Kingdom is all set to become one of the major new areas of technological and cultural growth in Europe. At the epicenter lies the city of Plymouth, whose enterprising university is already making waves in the academic world, not least in its establishment of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Computer Music Research (ICCMR). This center is formed of scholars from different backgrounds and different departments across the University, bringing together Computing, Neuroscience Education, Music, and Media. ICCMR is led by Eduardo Reck Miranda, a composer who deftly marries in his academic work visionary ideas about future states of music with the ability to articulate accessible and realistic music experiences.

*Voices* was a weekend festival of performances, lectures, demonstrations, and workshops exploring contemporary music for voices and showcasing computer music research and new creative developments at the University of Plymouth. It was a most successful collaboration between ICCMR and Peninsula Arts, an organization set up by the university under the direction of Simon Viñao’s *Hildegard’s Dream*. The third concert focused on the unique presence of Frances Lynch, one of the few international singers to have worked closely with composers of electroacoustic music. Her dramatic and most committed performances continue to inspire many composers, not least Mr. Miranda, whose *Requiem per una perduta* Ms. Lynch was able to rehearse and develop during a short residency promoted by ICCMR. Her concert also featured one of the classics of the genre, Alejandro Viñao’s *Hildegard’s Dream*. The third concert gave listeners an opportunity to experience something of Plymouth’s own alternative musical scene in a performance shared between remix performers Daniel and Matthew Smith and the songwriter John Matthias.

Woven into and around these concerts were performances that celebrated the wealth of community involvement in regional music-making. Saturday’s concert with Frances Lynch was shared with *Voces*, an amateur choir of 24 voices who performed under their conductor Martyn Warren an impressive and articulate new work by Karen Wimhurst. The choir also participated in electroacoustic works by Andrew Lovett and Mr. Miranda.

A lively program of lectures and workshops surrounded the concert events. Mr. Miranda gave a presentation of great clarity that examined the techniques he has been developing to create an artificial phonological system for his work *Sacra Conversazione*, an opera in five acts. His coda to the lecture introduced the intriguing notion that his newly developed research tools could well be used to explore how early humans may have spoken, and in conjunction with robotic simulations, might go further to exploring communication and behaviors. Ms. Lynch gave an invaluable “how to do it” guide for performers and composers. It was the kind of common-sense presentation all too rare in a cultural climate where the interpretation of digitally mediated work is so often regarded as the sole property of the artist and no one else. Sadly, composer Karen Wimhurst’s session could have benefited from a different slot in the schedule. What she said about her work and her background in community and theatre arts was most revealing, but those who heard her did so at the end of six hours of continuous events.

*Voices* was a most imaginatively planned and well-executed mini-festival that deserves to be established as a regular part of the contemporary music calendar in the UK. Further information can be found on the festival Web site [cmr.soc.plymouth.ac.uk/event.htm].