

Music

Piccolo

Todd Goodman: *Concerto for Piccolo and Orchestra* and *Echos: Prelude and Dance for piccolo and piano*. Wrong Note Media Inc.

Todd Goodman is currently composer-in-residence for the McKeesport Symphony Orchestra, Pennsylvania, which, with their conductor, Bruce Lauffer, commissioned this concerto. It was written especially for the piccolo player Torin Olsen, completed in April 2007 and premiered the following month by the same artists. (You can listen to an mp3 recording of the première at www.wrongnotemedia.com.)

The concerto's genesis, however, was the four-minute work *Echos: Prelude and Dance* that Olsen commissioned to perform in competition at the 2006 NFA convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; this also won the 2007 'Project Piccolo Rebirth' composition competition. *Echos* provided the majority of the concerto's first movement so I review both works together here.

To the eye, it was good to see both the piccolo parts and piano scores with protective (and attractive) glossy card covers plus full background information on the composer and composition. However, the concerto's solo part lacks any instrumental cues to guide each

entry and all of its page turns are unnecessarily impossible, rendering it practically unusable! Here and in the piano score the print size of tempo markings is microscopically small and generally all the music print would benefit from being larger. This goes for the piano score of *Echos*, too; however, its piccolo part is excellent, with a decent stave size and well-planned page turns.

The concerto is an engaging, tonal work with a clear structure to each movement. I was grateful for the live recording of both works that accompanied my review copies: Goodman uses a full orchestral accompaniment to create some enchanting textures, unimaginable from the piano reduction, yet at other times it can seem rather plain. The pensive, lucid slow movement sits well between the hypnotic first—where multiple instrumental lines weave intricate textures, the solo line being just one of many threads—and the chunky, aggressive last.

The music grows from fragments, not melody, but in the first movement (*Echos*) this organic inter-relation somehow inhibits any sense of development or journey. A dance-like motif tries to give it flight, but the static harmony is too grounding and the energy coiled up by the looping motifs never achieves true release. Hearing the same material in the *Echos* version with piano accompaniment seemed to suit it better, the fewer interweaving lines being more delineated. It would sit well in a recital with other short, contrasting pieces, but as an audition piece it would lack variety. The second movement (*Thesis*) is more successful: atmospheric, brooding and shapely—a heartfelt elegy, in fact—giving good scope for expressive playing. In the third (*Ascension*), restless, relentless figures rush and pound angrily; a demanding mental and technical workout. Shifting, accented 7/8 and 5/8 rhythms keep the energy high and the solo line is well balanced above the orchestration, soaring over its full weight or dancing lightly among its gentler voices. Be ready for the rather abrupt end, though.

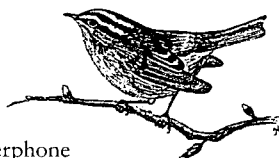
This concerto succeeds in exploring the piccolo's potential and enhances its image as an expressive, solo voice. My reservations concern its inner ebb and flow of energy and the emotional sticking points that it does not work through and resolve. Perhaps that is the purpose of some music: to give no solutions, only to set up situations, to pose scenarios? But if we are to be led on a journey, should we not be shown the destination, too?

Philip Rowson

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