

The New York Times

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

Drawn to What's Next, Not What Has Been

By **ALLAN KOZINN**

Published: December 8, 2003

For all one hears about the classical music world being a museum culture, there is an alternative musical world in New York, just outside the spotlight focused on the big performing institutions.

Virtually every night new music is on offer, usually in the smaller halls (or in places that specialize in it, like the Kitchen and Roulette), performed by musicians whose interpretive interests draw them toward what's next rather than what has been.

Sometimes it's the works that seem most irritating when you're hearing them that stay firmly in mind and, oddly, become more likable as memory replays them.

'Composers Close Up'

Yoav Gal's "Mosheh" (2003) is an opera that examines the incidental events and peripheral characters in the biblical story of Moses, rather than the monumental events. In "Colonnade," a 25-minute scene performed by Heather Green, a soprano, and the Ensemble Pamplemousse at Merkin Concert Hall on Thursday evening, Moses is taken by his mother to the Egyptian princess who has adopted him. The scene seemed as if it would never end, but since the performance I've been curious to hear the rest of the work.

Video affords Mr. Gal a split focus. The live action takes place in the Princess' chamber, where she enacts a strange, mannered ritual dance, surrounded by musicians in robes and huge-beaked bird masks. Her own costume included a bizarre headpiece, a see-through blouse and accouterments that generally seemed more in the spirit of a sci-fi space opera than ancient Egypt.

But then Egypt wasn't the point. The accompanying video began with superimposed images of huge modern concrete columns, adorned with spray-paint graffiti, often with traffic, passers-by and other images superimposed.

Eventually a child and his mother, both in modern dress, are seen walking past the columns, and toward the end of the work the Princess takes the mother's place. Ms. Green, as the Princess, sang a shrill, slowly repeating figure, accompanied by wind writing in the spirit of the Art Ensemble of Chicago and dirgelike strings, piano and percussion.

Mr. Gal was the last of three composers whose works were included in an installment of the Merkin Concert Hall's "Zoom: Composers Close Up" series, which mixes interviews (loosely conducted by Michael Gordon, the hall's resident composer) and performances in the style of Carnegie Hall's "Making Music" and WNYC's "New Sounds Live" (also usually held at Merkin).

Sometimes coincidental threads seem to tie together unrelated performances. The eerie vocalizations of Ms. Green in Mr. Gal's opera, for example, called to mind Luciano Berio's "Sequenza III" (1965) for voice and Joan La Barbara's "Conversations" (1988), both performed by Ms. La Barbara on Wednesday evening at the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America, at Columbia University.

...Complete article can be found at New York Times on-line archive at www.nytimes.com