

February 1, 2020

Feeding the Spirit



Edana Higham and Zac Pulak

It was a great pleasure to hear a brilliant 70-minute program given by the SHHH! Ensemble last night in the intimate surroundings of the Canadian Music Centre in Toronto.

They are embarking on a university tour with a provocative, interesting and entertaining collection of pieces for piano and percussion all having to do with the spirit.

Andy Akiho's *Karakurenai* is an intriguing concept for a piece where the piano and marimba play in unison various motivic patterns in irregular and unusual time signatures.

John Beckwith's *Meanwhile* stretches the expressive possibilities of the piano and marimba, with evocative glissandi dialogue between the instruments. At times they are working at cross-purposes, at times perfectly in synch. The latter part of this beautiful short piece has the marimba played with brushes and the piano strings strummed from the inside.

A solo percussion piece by Kelly-Marie Murphy followed, imitating mechanical inner workings and sounds. It was a captivating performance from Pulak, demonstrating his subtlety and power as a player.

John Gordon Armstrong's *The Angel's Share* is an understated, loving look at the tasting notes of various scotches and features a number of beautiful effects from both piano and percussion.

The final three pieces flowed seamlessly: an improvisation piece entitled *SHHHuffle* by Kevin Hanlon involving taped sounds as well as live riffing from the ensemble, morphing into a short chorale by JS Bach which had a haunting quality with the slight tuning discrepancies between piano and marimba and the final *Grieving the Doubts of Angels* by Micheline Roi brought the program to a suitable climax with truly virtuosic and intense playing from both Higham and Pulak.

As a whole, the program was a winner. I hope we'll hear a lot more from this dynamic duo in the future and encourage you to catch them on their tour, the details of which you can find on their website: <https://shhhensemble.com/>

- Larry Beckwith



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