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## THE Arts

### *Flute as a Study of Breath*

Audience members were still filing into the auditorium of the Kitchen in Manhattan on Friday evening when the flutist Claire Chase ambled onstage for her solo recital.

**CORINNA  
da FONSECA-  
WOLLHEIM**

**MUSIC  
REVIEW**

Dressed in denim overalls and red socks, a polishing cloth in hand, she fussed over the instruments that had been set up in a cluster of stands at the center of the space, devoting a few extra moments to buffing the contrabass flute which, six feet tall, towered over her. That flute was in turn dwarfed by a neon light sculpture on the back wall that echoed the instrument's shape, forming a one-armed abstraction of an ankh, the Egyptian hieroglyph signifying breath of life. Eventually, Ms. Chase picked up a standard concert flute, climbed halfway up a ladder in a far corner of the stage and began to play Edgar Varèse's "Density 21.5."

Humility and hubris blend in unexpected ways in Ms. Chase's work. Friday's hourlong show was presented as Part 3 in a 22-year commissioning bonanza, "Density 2036," during which she is seeking to create an entire new repertory of works for solo flute. The title refers to Varèse's groundbreaking flute solo from 1936. By the time of its centenary Ms. Chase, who will then be 58, hopes to have redefined flute music for a new generation.

Friday's performance of "Density 2036: part iii" made no secret of its ambitions, even as it suggested a work in progress. The world premieres Ms. Chase presented ran the full gamut from mystery to irreverence, from the shamanistic "Lila" by Dai Fujikura, with its ghostly lyrical bass flute melodies, to the joyfully unhinged silliness of Pauline Oliveros's "Intensity 20.15," a protracted sound tantrum for which Ms. Chase spurned the flute altogether. Instead, she unleashed her virtuosity in intricate vocalizations and gleeful explosions of noise,



ROSS KARRE

**Claire Chase** playing Part 3 of her project "Density 2036" at the Kitchen in Manhattan.

electronically distorted, which she drew from all manner of instruments, objects and body parts — even the knees of a front-row listener.

Digital processing added a halo of alienation to her playing in Francesca Verunelli's "The Famous Box Trick" for bass flute and electronics. Nathan Davis's "Limn" for bass flute, contrabass flute and electronics employed extended techniques to produce expressive sounds of painful fragility. Jason Eckardt's "The Silenced," billed as "a monodrama for solo flute," worked with similarly brittle sounds and amplified breathing patterns in unsettling ways.

As the neon symbol in the background seemed to suggest, any exploration of flute music is also a study in human breathing and the interaction of that breath with the physical world. Thoughtfully choreographed and beautifully lit by Nicholas Houfek, Ms. Chase's one-woman journey highlighted the flute's adaptability to fluctuating expressions of energy, density and resonance.