

The New York Times

Saturday, October 11, 2008

THE Arts

Conversations, Free-Flowing Yet Precise

Muhai Richard Abrams and Amina Claudine Myers, seated at a pair of dovetailed grand pianos, improvised without interruption for nearly an hour at the Kitchen

MUSIC REVIEW

NATE
CHINEN

on Thursday night, in a remarkable display of restlessness, responsiveness and focus. And that was only the second half of the concert. A longer first half featured the Wet Ink Ensemble performing intricate chamber pieces, including one by Mr. Abrams. Either part of the program could have stood alone, but they meant a good deal more in juxtaposition.

In a sense they represented two distinct hemispheres of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians. Established in Chicago in 1965 by Mr. Abrams and others, the group has long supported works of varying dimensions. A free-form duo recital is hardly more characteristic than an orchestral suite.

The association has had a banner year, due in part to the publication of a book by George E. Lewis, "A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music." Mr. Lewis, the director of the Center for Jazz

A Power Stronger Than Itself continues on Saturday at 8 p.m. (with a 5 p.m. panel discussion) at the Kitchen, 512 West 19th Street, Chelsea; (212) 255-5793, thekitchen.org; \$10.

Muhai Richard Abrams and Amina Claudine Myers/Wet Ink Ensemble
The Kitchen

Studies at Columbia University, organized Thursday's event with Christopher McIntyre, his fellow trombonist and composer; a second installment on Saturday will involve a similar concert (with different music), preceded by a panel discussion with Ms. Myers, Mr. Lewis and others.

Wet Ink, deployed in various groupings, brought admirable precision to its task. Mr. Abrams's Trio for Violin, Clarinet, and Cello came across as a careful study of spatial relations, with one instrument frequently working against the others. "He Didn't Give Up/He Was Taken," by Henry Threadgill, featured alto saxophone, piano, voice and violin, often in coordinated rhythm. Its use of dissonance felt less icy and more playful.

The vocalist was Jeff Gavett, an even-tempered baritone who faithfully enunciated a text by Thulani Davis; he did the same with verse by Daniel Moore in Roscoe Mitchell's "White Tiger Disguise." That composition also featured some confident, autumnal-sounding writing for string quintet, though it succumbed at times to meandering.

"Wonderlust," by Leroy Jenkins, employed 11 pieces in a for-

ward-tumbling mass, starting with a unison line for violin and electric guitar. Its dynamic variation was broad and rewarding: one stretch had a bassoonist barking percussively; another involved a tenor saxophone essay by Alex Minck, Wet Ink's artistic director. If he was reading his part, he did a good job of suggesting spontaneity.

There was no need for suggestion from Mr. Abrams and Ms. Myers. Their performance was a model of assertive dialogue throughout, starting in a zone of rustling impressionism and ending with a sharp harrumph. The contours in between were wavelike: unpredictable but logical, with a strong undertow.

Of course the differences between the two pianists were fascinating. Ms. Myers favored ceremonial intervals, a higher register and a bright, transparent tone; Mr. Abrams was more emphatic and more truculent, often rumbling a rhythmic motif with hard-nosed determination. But only rarely did one sensibility upset the balance. They accommodated each other in a way that advanced their cause.

ONLINE: CREATIVE MUSICIANS

Previous Times coverage of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians:

nytimes.com/music