

Preludes, Fanfares, and Toccatas

The DSO led off with the world premiere of a splendid orchestral work by Ronald Caltabiano. *Preludes, Fanfares, and Toccatas* is no lightweight showpiece, as the name might suggest. It's one 17-minute span that cross-cuts snarling cacophony, rhythmic athleticism and a lyricism rare in contemporary music.

The orchestra brought it off gorgeously, too. The "prelude" sections weave slow string melodies against quietly exotic excursions in the winds and a high-pitched rattle in the percussion reminiscent of an electronic whine. Never have the DSO violins sounded so sleek and pure as in this exposed, potentially treacherous writing.

Dallas Morning News

Prolegomenon

The orchestra opened the program with the world premiere of Ronald Caltabiano's "Prolegomenon."

In its color and rhythmic impetus, the work — which was beautifully played by the orchestra — demonstrated anew that the 35-year-old composer is one of this country's best.

The [Baltimore] Sun

Concertini

Caltabiano's *Concertini* was a striking and original work in 10 movements, each in a different character, six featuring either solo instruments or particular combinations. The extraordinary thing was the coherence and continuity between movements achieved despite their individuality, the brilliance of the contrasts of mood, of texture — dark, cloudy, impressionistic, bright and high. Caltabiano produces strong, evocative gestures by way of musical ideas, but they are as pronounced as they are brief. This work calls out for repetition within the year....

San Francisco Chronicle

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San Francisco Chronicle

Poplars

The 15-minute work was a riveting creation.... The gently chromatic adagios feature longspun, Bergian string writing and pointillistic dabs of wind color, while the highly dissonant allegros highlight surging brass and crashing percussion.... A piece built around contrasts as violent as *Poplars* would crumble in less skilled hands; due to Caltabiano's compulsive desire for structural clarity, however, the listener can follow the composition's progress and sense the overall formal scheme. *Poplars* is deftly orchestrated, characterized by grandiose, arching brass lines, virtuoso percussion, lush string melodies and fluttering winds.

Musical America

The work is most active, possessing infectious imagery and energy, and the orchestral palette is used to the full.... Caltabiano delivers his message in an instantly appealing way.

[New York] Daily News

Concerto for Alto Saxophone

...[displays] an ambitious mind, eager to dazzle and amuse. Piercing again and again through the busy orchestral fabric, the sax asserted, commented, and blended amiably. Easily understandable and a bravura chance for the soloist..., the Concerto pleased the crowd and livened the atmosphere.

[San Francisco] Bay Area Reporter

In the Concerto one may again perceive Caltabiano's strong dramatic contrasts, his lucidity of motivic and structural process, his idiomatic instrumental sense.... All this is brought to fruition in the coda: marked "*placido ed espressivo*," it is a passage of sheer beauty, its tender, yearning sax line hovering above a hushed, modal string accompaniment.

Music and Musicians [London]

Northwest!

Caltabiano's *Northwest!* is an attractive, vigorous work rooted in the populist tradition of Aaron Copland....

It has an outdoorsy sound, with its expansive strings and pungent clashes of brass and percussion.

The Cincinnati Post

The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra opened its program with a world premiere — a piece called *Northwest!* by New York composer Ronald Caltabiano.... He's a protege of Aaron Copland, and the music shows traces of that great composer's influence — the wide intervals, the chorale-like flavors. Yet its structure and musical argument suggest a Samuel Barber *Essay for Orchestra*.
The Cincinnati Enquirer

Prolegomenon

In its color and rhythmic impetus, the work — which was beautifully played by the orchestra — demonstrated anew that the 35-year-old composer is one of this country's best.

The [Baltimore] Sun

String Quartet No. 1

[Caltabiano] has already amassed a remarkable list of compositional credits. On the basis of this almost amazingly mature effort, he would appear to deserve his accolades. Mr. Caltabiano works within the fiercer confines of modernist dissonance, but in a way that suggests an opening up of that idiom to more engaging kinds of communication.

The New York Times

Ronald Caltabiano's first String Quartet was composed in 1981 in two locations that are reflected in its thematic material. An abrupt, surly, dissonant section marked "*molto aggressivo*" was conceived in New York and includes about a dozen bars of sheer insanity for the cello. It is followed by a beautifully tranquil passage, marked "*legato e dolce*," that breathes the peaceful atmosphere of the Orkney Islands.... Despite their sharply contrasting profiles, these two ideas are gradually reconciled in the remainder of the work, which was beautifully played by the Juilliard Quartet.... It is a highly expressive, imaginatively structured piece of music.

The Washington Post

...Angry, slashing, dissonant chords which soon yield to a frenzied, sinuous chromaticism.... The violence is replaced by haunting, ethereal, almost motionless lyricism built around sustained melodic lines and modal harmonies.... This is not some kind of abstract intellectual game: the distinctive motivic content of the two ideas, and their widely contrasting emotional stance, allows the structural process to be clearly apparent to the listener.

Music and Musicians [London]

String Quartet No. 2

This vivid three-movement work is a pitched battle between lurching thicket of dissonance and rhythms...and an open, expressive (almost tender) lyrical element first sounded by the viola and later taken up by the cello. Caltabiano has a gifted ear for expressionistic sound, and the Emerson [Quartet's] performance was gripping.

[Baltimore] Evening Sun

The work's outer movements contrast the ideas of dissonant *allegro molto* rhythmic incisiveness against *andante* lyricism. In the first movement the lyricism subjugates the dissonance, while in the last the aggressive spirit of the work's opening claims the final victory. These two movements frame an intermezzo that builds slowly to a gripping climax, then recedes. Caltabiano's is a vigorous, attractive work, well worth the effort for both performer and audience.

The [Newark] Star-Ledger

Lyric Duo

A change from the fragmentary nature of much contemporary music is the *Lyric Duo* for viola and harp.... The one-movement work has firm shape and direction, alternating between insistent repeated-note material and lyrical wide-ranging melodies. The instruments are both fully exploited and dialogue textures are refreshingly inventive.

The Musical Times [London]

Two tightly argued and imaginatively conceived instrumental pieces went far...to explain the impressive list of honors and commissions Ronald Caltabiano has achieved.... *Lyric Duo* for viola and harp sets out to combine opposing musical elements — and that is a theme that runs through both the music and the dramaturgy of Mr. Caltabiano's output to date.

The New York Times

Quilt Panels

Quilt Panels for clarinet, horn, string trio and piano was inspired by the AIDS Quilt.... The sextet is in six continuous sections, each of which is dominated by a single instrument. From a simple set of notes — it begins with some angry gestures by the horn — it builds to something grand and sad.... But what was most impressive was the young composer's control of his materials, his ability to suggest nostalgia without becoming sentimental and his ability to write idiomatically for his superb instrumentalists.

The [Baltimore] Sun

Quilt Panels is an obliquely emotional abstraction of mounting anguish and assaulted dignity. Symphonic scale is approached at the climax of the work, which plumbs depths of feeling without cheap theatrics or pulsing pathos.

The [New Orleans] Times-Picayune

Concerto for Six Players

Solo instrumental lines emerged from a discreetly textured web of sound...[creating a] sense of pulse on which the music rode into moments of wonderful serenity — which alone makes me want to hear the piece again.

The [London] Independent

An effectively varied and attractively euphonious 20-minute piece which exploited the full range of the ensemble's virtuosity in a sequence of concertante passages, neatly drawn together at the end.

The [Great Britain] Guardian

Rotations

This [two-CD set] is a varied and entertaining collection ... a virtual showcase of the instrument...
 [T]he *pièce de résistance* of the set is *Rotations* for 16 horns by Ronald Caltabiano.
Canberra Times

Rotations, by American composer Ronald Caltabiano, is a skillfully woven musical tapestry which belies the undoubted challenges which confront the 16 horn players. ...Although Caltabiano's work is only five minutes in duration, it stands out as the highlight of the recording.
Melbourne Herald-Sun

Torched Liberty

Torched Liberty emerged a strong work, one that should find itself in the repertory. Caltabiano's vocal writing is demanding but right for the voice. [He] has assembled a libretto pointing up American persecution related to the start of the gay rights movement, blacks and the Ku Klux Klan, the internment of Japanese-Americans and the destruction of American Indian culture, concluding that the witch hunts of the 18th century continue. Only the objects change.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Medea

The music showed an enviable command of pacing, structure, and word setting.... The vocal line...can climb or sink, rush or linger, break through the ensemble or meditate alone.... He must be accounted a promising new voice.

The New Yorker

Medea (1980-81), for soprano and twelve instruments, demonstrates a number of features that have continued to characterize [Caltabiano's] work. Prime among these is an almost uncanny ability to write confidently and idiomati-

cally for his instrumental forces.... Similarly apparent is the tightly knit motive structure of these works, with recurring, recognizable phrases lending a comforting clarity and organic substance to the overall form.

Music and Musicians [London]

Sonata for Solo Cello

In its first movement, entitled "Transformations," an explosively passionate *allegro declamando* is interrupted briefly by a lyrical *andante* fragment. Soon, [an] audible structural process develops between these two dramatic extremes: the *allegro* sections become shorter — by the movement's end a mere fragment — while the *andante* passages lengthen and develop into full-fledged thematic material. The Sonata's second movement, "Variations," employs a free technique in which the theme is simultaneously ornamented by the addition of new pitches, and "thinned out" by the removal of original ones. By the second movement's end, the musical material of the opening *declamando* has returned, producing a satisfyingly organic motivic unity for the overall Sonata.

Music and Musicians [London]

The Sonata for Solo Cello is a structurally satisfying work written in the highly chromatic idiom for which Caltabiano is known.... The Sonata is in two movements, "Transformations" and "Variations," each based upon the contrast of two distinctly different tempos and moods.... The Sonata for Solo Cello is a serious work that challenges both performer and audience; it deserves frequent programming.

Notes

Ellington Sonata
(for double bass)

Ronald Caltabiano, a young prize-winning composer, combines the fruits of a meticulous academic training with a singing Duke Ellington style, a dark, nervous passion with an awesome virtuosity in his *Ellington Sonata*.... The second movement, based on fragmented quotes from Ellington's "Sophisticated Lady," is the most accessible to performer and audience and may, according to the composer, be performed as a separate piece. However, the fiery last movement, when played well, can be breathtaking.

Notes

Prelude and Fugue
(for organ)

The Prelude begins by unfolding pitch material in sustained notes in the pedal with pointillistic interjections on the manuals. As the movement progresses, the long pedal notes disappear, and the texture becomes complex and contrapuntal in three parts. As the Prelude concludes, the sustained notes return with a fuller version of the opening. The Fugue is a double fugue beginning with a double exposition in triple meter.... Following the double exposition, fragments of the subjects and pitch material derived from the subject are employed in a dense contrapuntal texture. The rhythmic movement increases, climaxing in a cadenza.

Notes

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