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 Auteur : Elissa Pool

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**THE GLOBE AND MAIL**

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SECTION R

**MUSIC REVIEW**

**Guitar solos and a blindfolded orchestra – chamber music gets deep and funny**

**Ensemble contemporain de Montréal**  
 Conducted by *Véronique Lacroix*  
 At Philip T. Young Recital Hall  
 In Victoria on Sunday

REVIEWED BY  
**ELISSA POOLE**

Looking more like pirates than classical musicians in their black bandanas, the members of Ensemble contemporain de Montréal walked on stage for the performance of a new piece by Cassandra Miller, took their places and pulled their bandanas over their eyes. Miller's *Concerto for violin and blindfolded ensemble* was the most overtly provocative piece presented by this excellent new music ensemble in Victoria on Sunday, but all the pieces upturned musical expectations.

Every two years, ECM+ takes a program of new Canadian music on the road as part of its *Génération* project. The composers, chosen previously in a juried competition, come with the group, and talk about their pieces before the performance of each work. It's considerably less than a lecture recital, but it's also more informative than program notes

played inside the piano – to more robust combinations. But always the combinations are too complex (and evolve in too constant and arbitrary a fashion) to grasp in their entirety. Thus no two listeners can hear the same piece.

At odds with the wordy, philosophical tangle of his program note, Simon Martin's *Musique d'art pour orchestre de chambre* obsessed on a single basic pitch. This is relentlessly passed through the ensemble, nosed in and out, bounced back and forth in aggressive offbeats, even sounded loud, long and dirty in an electric guitar solo (by guitarist Tim Brady) that unrolls a flea market's variety of special effects. The pitch is at its most tantalizing when deliberately mistuned, creating close, trilling undulations that can be as opalescent as a string of tiny pearls or as phlegmy as Louis Armstrong's voice.

Christopher Mayo's *Binding the Quiet* starts out in a brushed, pitchless soundscape of airy sounds and rustled paper. As it gradually accumulates more surface detail, all derived from the same simple melodic line, rhythmic patterns begin to dominate, and the transformation is quick, total and delirious.

But of all the pieces, Miller's blindfolded concerto thought hardest about convention, in "musical" material, in interpretation and in our concert-going lives. Her performers essentially compete – in categories that include boasting, stillness (while smoking a cigarette!) and loneliness – in applying to extravagant degrees the techniques musicians use to signal emotion: vibrato, sighs, hesitations, dynamics, articulation. The very idea of competition, so much a part of professional music life in general and the concerto form in particular, is certainly the topic; but so are our often hackneyed means of musical "communication." This concerto is fun, but serious, too, and that was true about the concert as a whole. Something made me laugh in every piece; much more made me think.

The Ensemble contemporain de Montréal performs at Vancouver's Cellar Restaurant on Tuesday. Montréal's Conservatoire de musique on Nov. 11, Ottawa's National Arts Centre on Nov. 13, Toronto's Music Gallery on Nov. 14 and Memorial University in St. John's on Nov. 16.

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The ensemble practised smoking, showing off and stillness. MICHEL DUBREUIL

tion, emancipated deliberately provides, as the composer phrased it, "too much information." Often using unconventional methods – what we call "extended performance techniques" – the musicians make individual contributions to an intricate (and often beautiful) sonic curtain comprised of innumerable, intangible threads. These range from fuzzy, near shadow-sounds – ghostly percussion glissandi, wind multiphonics, overblown whistle tones from the flute, string harmonics, and notes