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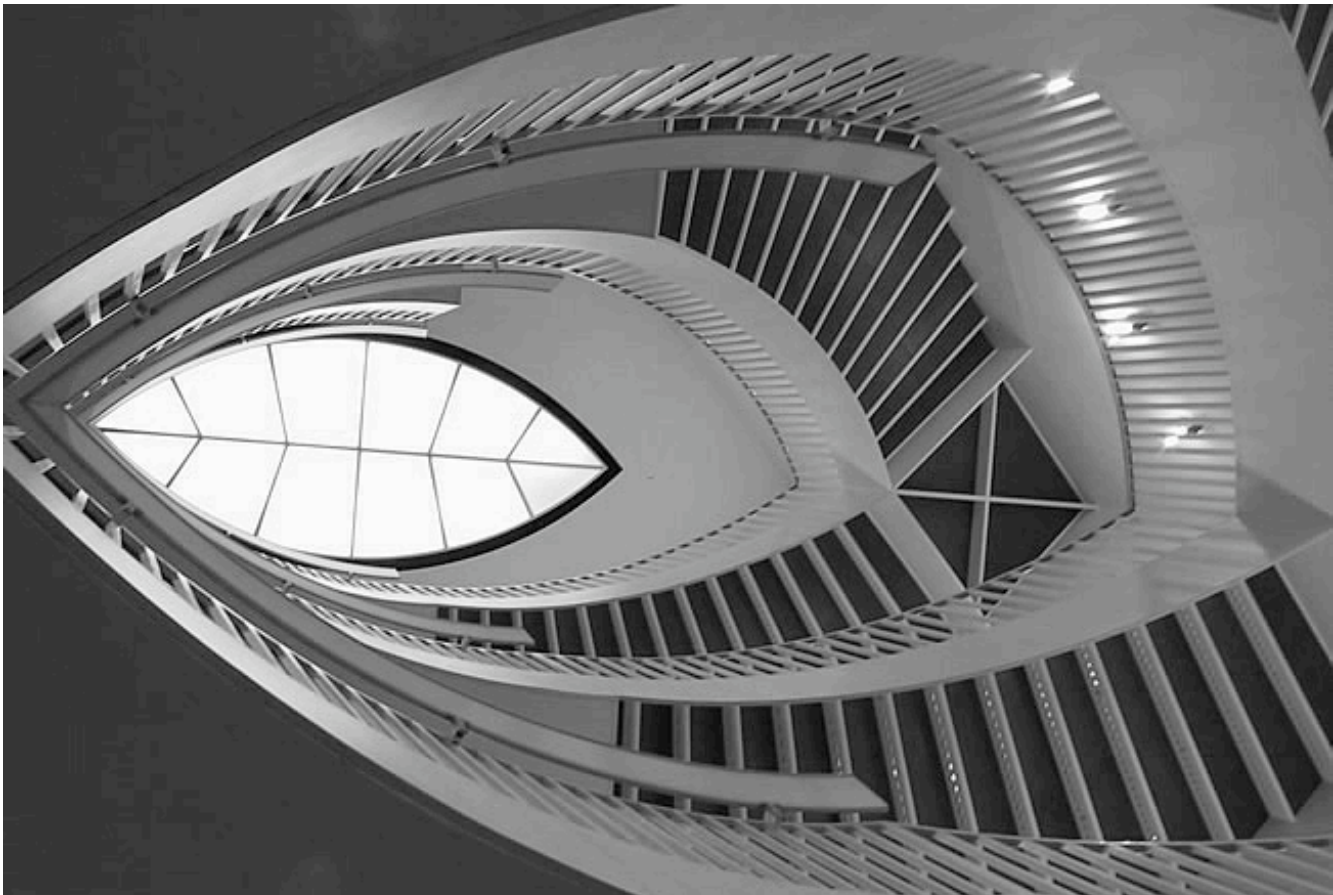
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By Bryant Manning

Sun Nov 22, 2009 at 12:39 pm





Seth Boustead, the executive director of Accessible Contemporary Music, is hard to miss these days. He is seen and heard all around town pushing the music of local composers, whether it's through a radio spot or a free lunch-time concert at the Sherwood Conservatory. His monthly radio show, *Relevant Tones*, showcases all of ACM's recent activity—and there is a lot of it.

On Saturday night at Ganz Hall, Boustead and ACM featured their ensemble-in-residence Palomar in an excellent “Mostly American” program, highlighting composers who are not only are living, but who were mostly in attendance.

A creator himself, Boustead showed off one of his own works, a two-movement, abbreviated version of incidental music he wrote for dancers in tandem with another composer on Saturday's program, Amos Gillespie. *1,001 Afternoons in Chicago* is based on two old eccentric newspaper tales, where Boustead scored music to a woman who long to be called “deceased” and about an unlucky man who succumbs to pouring rain in downtown Chicago.

The former unfolds like a black-and-white still-life painting, with dashes of color slowly filling out the frame. There is minimal movement in this score for seven-piece ensemble, and Boustead got plenty of emotional mileage with the doleful, motionless figurations he supplied his strings. For the episodic driving rain movement, he mimicked the downpour with pounding conga drums, staccato woodwinds and tapping pizzicatos. Chris Ramaekers served as the evening's fine guest conductor.

Daniel Silliman, just 16, benefitted greatly from ACM's Young Composers Prize, and his *It's a Trap!* earned a superb debut from the Palomar ensemble. There is a Glassian motor running this darkly lyrical score and individual contributions from violinist Austin Wulliman, cellist Alyson Berger and pianist Hulya Alpakin were sharply detailed. Somehow, a bright Latin dance crawled into the closing bars, earning the teen composer wild applause.

Gillespie contributed *Tempered Heathen*, whose roiling piano ostinatos served flute and cello in creepingly maniacal fashion. For a concert of American music, this sounded closest to the product of continental Europe circa 1960.

The chirpiest music on Saturday was found from the mind of guitarist/composer D. J. Sparr, whose *Woodlawn Drive* might have also been subtitled “Music Box for Small Ensemble.” With clarion xylophone blows and bubbly woodwinds, the score seemed to propel onward with the imaginary turn of a crank. Irish composer Stephen Gardner's *You Never Know What's Around the Corner* was a beautifully bitchy and scatterbrained score that gave all instrumentalists the opportunity to seize furiously on their hardware, perhaps none better than Matthew Peters' extended drum solo.

Joan Tower's nocturnal *Big Sky* piano trio occupied the so-called popular slot on this program, featuring a stunningly morose dialogue of cello and violin. And what could be more “accessible” in ACM's mission than free beer and mingling afterwards?

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