

Christopher Taylor

Premiere: Currier Piano Concerto at Miller Theater*"Taylor, the superb soloist, brought a deep focus and ease to the outer movements' ebb and flow"***The New York Times**

March 9, 2010

MUSIC REVIEW | ARGENTO CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

Sneezes, Hiccups, Laughs and a Chamber Group

By STEVE SMITH

Suggesting that advances in technology have had an impact on classical music is stating what has long been obvious. As the piano was improved, [Beethoven](#) and [Chopin](#) produced works that tapped into its new possibilities. Novel implements afforded further expressive potential: Ravel's saxophone, Strauss's wind machine, Respighi's phonograph and Varèse's magnetic tape. The sampling keyboard, which can digitally reproduce any sound, was a revolution unto itself.

Bearing all that in mind, you could still be amused by imagining Sebastian Currier scouring special-effects libraries on the Internet to find just the right sneeze for "Bodymusic," a witty, imaginative new piece presented by the Argento Chamber Ensemble during a Composer Portrait concert at the Miller Theater on Friday evening. Mr. Currier described the search in an onstage discussion with the WNYC radio host John Schaefer before the work's premiere.

In 16 short movements spanning 40 minutes, Mr. Currier deployed digital samples of footsteps, opening and shutting doors, chatter, hiccups, laughter, dual orgasms and more. The sounds, played through loudspeakers around the theater, were woven among musical strands played on subtly amplified acoustic instruments.

At times the players mimicked and extended the sound effects. Elsewhere the interplay was more involved. In a section called "Humiliation," Sycil Mathai, an excellent trumpeter, chattered, growled and trilled lines with a mute, accompanied by what sounded like a sitcom laugh track. Near the end, with the laughter tweaked to sound distant and submerged, you could imagine [Joan Rivers](#) delivering a catty monologue on a sinking cruise ship.

The piece was always clever and often rich, and the Argento players, conducted by Michel Galante, were alert, quick-witted interpreters. Still, Mr. Currier's technical achievement here did not eclipse the craft and refinement he showed in two earlier pieces.

His Piano Concerto (2006), which also uses digital sampling for lapping waves and sonorous echoes in the finale, seemed less self-consciously showy and more organically integrated. Christopher Taylor, the superb soloist, brought a deep focus and ease to the outer



Artist Management

movements' ebb and flow and a fierce dexterity to the middle section, "Edgy," a bustling workout that recalled music by [Prokofiev](#) and Raymond Scott.

The evening's most beguiling work came from the violinist Miranda Cuckson and the harpist Jacqueline Kerrod, who opened the concert with a rapt account of Mr. Currier's neo-Impressionistic "Night Time" (1998), which involved no wiring apart from the strings of their instruments.