
Classical Music in Review

- A collaboration of sounds, some of them vocal
 - An Armenian memorial ■ One sort of Schubert revival ■ The American String Quartet.
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Thomas Buckner

Baritone

Merkin Concert Hall

Thomas Buckner, a powerful and persuasive advocate of contemporary vocal music, likes a mix of collaborators in his recitals. On Thursday night, he was joined by the percussion ensemble Essential Music and the pianist Joseph Kubera for a program that included five world premieres.

Sorrel Hays's "Dreaming the World," requiring both percussion and piano, was the largest work, offering a fascinating variety of sounds: Tibetan singing bowls, Appalachian buttons-on-a-string (producing wind noises, among others) and percussive piano effects. But musical inspiration was very thinly spread over the five movements; the final section, "Waterbug," unconvincingly and interminably re-enacted a "deer dance" of the Yuma American Indians. A grab bag of sounds also propelled Anna Rubin's "Dangerous Lullabies," but the construction was tighter and the musical images more vivid. "A father is trying to put his baby to sleep but slips into his own nightmare," the note explained; a quotation from Schubert's "Erlkönig" played a role.

Mr. Buckner's skills as an improviser were on display in his own "Dynamic Crossings" and in David Wessel's "Situations 1," both accompanied by Mr. Wessel's remarkable computer setup, which produces sounds in tandem with a performer's hand movements. Alvin Lucier's "Music for Baritone with Slow Sweep Pure Wave Oscillators" created a hypnotic sound field of closely intermingling, pulsing tones. William Hawley's "Rapture of Endymion," a setting from Keats, and Jeffrey Schanzer's "Lament for Erik," with viola accompaniment by Lois Martin, displayed a more traditional lyrical approach; Mr. Hawley's work, with its almost Schumannesque Romantic harmonies, seemed peculiarly out of place on this program, but it demonstrated Mr. Buckner's exceptional range.

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