



Numus gives life to Murderous Little World

Review by Stephen Preece, for The Record

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KITCHENER — Continuing an eclectic season of adventurous programming, NUMUS' Friday night performance entitled *Murderous Little World* was a mesmerizing multi-media combination of music, video, and theatre.

Composer Linda Bouchard was on hand at the Conrad Centre for the Performing Arts, to explain the creation process for this hour-long work. It was nearly a decade in the making, from the first time she heard the featured trio — where she immediately became inspired to write for them — through a long process of organic and incremental development to the finished piece.

Bellows and Brass combines three of Canada's finest performers for their instruments: Guy Few (trumpet and piano), Joseph Petric (accordion), and Eric Vaillancourt (trombone) — this performance taking them well beyond the traditional roles as performing musicians.

Excerpts of five poems by Anne Carson from the book *Men in the Off Hours* provided the inspiration. The composer suggested there was an overall arc to the work — though distinct shapes and contours were tricky to mark in this amorphous piece.

The opening combination of visuals and music was stunning. Sped-up night-time cars passed feverishly onscreen, gradually overlaid with shuffling cards — a continuous performance motif. With equal intensity, all three musicians huddled around the piano — Few seated, clanging out a fiery percussive keyboard assault in three, the others clattering mallets, brushes and sticks to raise a cacophonous riot inside the piano, supported by ambient recorded sounds. The effect was simultaneously overwhelming, intoxicating and irresistible.

Horns and accordion shifted to a heavy military four beat, performers sporadically spinning circles, instruments alternating held and punctuated notes. Visuals included a rotating Statue of Liberty, pan-glimpses of the sun, and shifting playing cards now bearing the faces of people. The lights came up, and the performers sparred with verbal biblical fragments, eventually settling into a cool rhythmic groove.

One of the most compelling segments drew from the poem *Freud (1st draft)*. Ruminating on an experiment involving the dissection of 1000 eels, the famous psychologist bemoans the fact that human dissection is illegal and therefore making his subjects *unapproachable*. This brief anecdote is cleverly revisited with scattered text fragments, rapid-fire sentences zipping across the screen, and the spoken word — the observer all the while grasping for understanding.

A shock of blue sky and brilliant white clouds injected rhythmic respite as the performers turned briefly to a layered vocal chant — monastery monks earnest and wobbly. Then back to Freud and his eels.

Other visual elements included war planes and parachutes, school children in forward and backwards motion,

what appeared to be a Vietnamese village, and again the statue of liberty — only this time scowling in a jarring black-and-white.

Repeated themes probed and provoked with images and music: “what is sound?” and “how do we best come to know something?” carried through with a continuous pulsating beat and playing cards keeping us in the game.

The final segment featured Few repeatedly crooning *Murderous Little World* in a campy, show-tune style — nostalgia simultaneously combined with an innocently smiling girl, a spray of stars and fighter planes, and a man balancing atop a vintage, rickety two-wing plane — all fading to a scratchy vinyl record.

As with the inspiration for the work, the performance experience was poetic. Intense infusions of images, words and sounds evoked any number of meanings and messages — at times tender, intimate, and humanly-connected; and at others, jarringly global, mechanical, and overwhelming.

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