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BMOP presents an array of plugged-in works at Paine Hall

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By Keith Powers



Jonathan Harvey's "Bhakti" was the major work on Boston Modern Orchestra Project's program of electronic music Friday night at Paine Hall.

The Fromm Music Foundation at Harvard presented the first of two explorations of some of electronic music's seminal large-scale works Friday evening at Paine Hall, engaging Boston's preeminent new music ensemble, the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, to tackle challenging works by Charles Wuorinen, Gérard Grisey and Jonathan Harvey.

This was the first of two programs, scheduled to begin and end with Wuorinen's *Epithalamium*. A wedding fanfare written for duo trumpets, Wuorinen's 1997 work was not part of the tape-and-players premise, but a symbolic introduction to it. The piece itself, about five minutes long, places the musicians (Terry Everson and Eric Berlin) in opposition to each other in front of the stage, playing muted instruments and offering dissimilar phrases of similar length—about a normal breath—first in rhythmic unison, then in a disjointed

pattern, then returning to a common beat. As a wedding tribute, it must have been a touching tribute to two individuals uniting for life.

Grisey's *Jour, Contre-jour* places a tape loop that includes occasional suggestions of a human heartbeat behind a small orchestra. The human rhythm quickly becomes less central to the work than the sound world, which uses techniques associated with *musique spectrale* to blend the tape sounds with the acoustic instruments.

Spectralism examines timbre through mathematical analysis, illustrating how sound can move incrementally from pitch to pitch outside of the confines of the normal scales. In *Jour, Contre-jour* pitches are suggested on the tape, then micro-managed by the players into new sound worlds.

Yet with the tape running constantly, interpretation—especially rhythmic creativity—is practically impossible. Conductor Gil Rose gave cues and some sense of changes in tension, but everyone onstage was essentially accompanying a sophisticated metronome.

Not so with Jonathan Harvey's sprawling *Bhakti*, which filled the second half of the program. Harvey, also deeply involved in spectralism and its possibilities, uses an intermittent recording to develop sonic interplay. Employing not only taped electronic sounds—often resembling the Doppler effect of airplanes landing or taking off—but also recorded instruments, mostly bells and percussion, Harvey's twelve-movement work seemed to explore every corner of the sonic universe.

The work begins with a single pitch, G, played drone-like by cellist Rafael Popper-Keizer, which begins with a series of harmonic fields. Any sense of rhythm or tempo is absent—without a pulse, the sound becomes meditative. Developed sections (they couldn't really be called solos) for harp (Ina Zdorovetchi), clarinets (Michael Norsworthy, Amy Advocat), cello (Popper-Keizer) and brass set off the players against the swirling sound, reproduced by eight speakers that surrounded the players onstage and the audience.

Rose was busy, not only focusing the players in each section but cuing the electronic forces entering and exiting. At the center of the work came a movement where Harvey's fascination with taped bells, their overtones and decay, created an emotional climax. None of this was easy music, but collectively it offered a fascinating exploration into notions of sound and music.