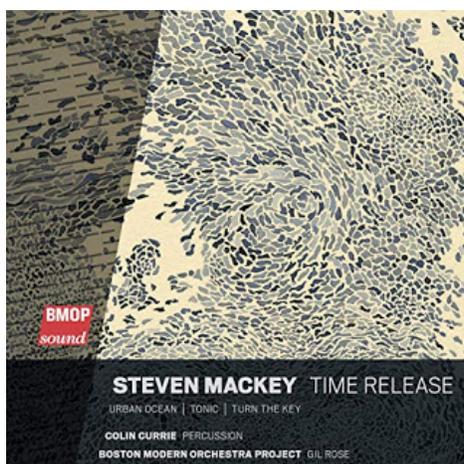


# Gapplegate Classical-Modern Music Review

Tuesday, January 7, 2020

## Steven Mackey, *Time Release*, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Gil Rose



The latest volume of the Boston Modern Orchestra Project finds Gil Rose directing the orchestra for a selection of interesting and contrasting works by Steven Mackey (b 1956). It is entitled *Time Release* (BMOP 1068) after the 2005 work that is a centerpiece of the program.

Four pieces comprise the whole and flesh out a vision of Mackey's vivid orchestral palette, and in the process give us an architectonic sense of layering and rhythmic shape. The works span a near decade--from the aforementioned 2005 title piece to the program opening "Urban Ocean" of 2013.

The dimensionality of the music is apparent from the first strains of "Urban Ocean." Mackey rightly calls attention in the liners to the "painterly" use of tone and color in the work, with correspondingly less motivic, rhythmic, or harmonic syntax per se. The composer envisions "powerful yet invisible waves" churning underneath the surface and then breaking on the beach. In that way the music suggests a natural, cyclical process more than linear travel from point a to point b.

"Time Release" is the longest of the four works at more than 30 minutes broken into four movements. The solo percussion part is given palpable animate life by Colin Currie. It showcases especially the solo marimba as a mature and vibrantly polyphonic vehicle in poignant interaction with the orchestra for a music at once, in the words of the composer, "distinctive and soulful."

"Tonic" (2011) comes together out of a harmony built from "leading" and

"complimentary" notes more than a note-for-note counterpoint, out of a foreground harmony of some simplicity with a background shadow harmony of greater complexity. The effect is mesmerizing in ways that strike an original pose. This is not Minimalism but you could say that it motors along a parallel highway. It whirs at times cylindrically but not at all formulaically. There is at root something between a series of riffs and a series of sequences, yet they hang together in their own way and do not exactly repeat so much as at some point *complete*.

The concluding "Turn the Key" (2006) gives us a rhythmic dance-like figure redolent of Latin American music that the composer recalled hearing in Miami and so found appropriate for this commissioned work to mark the opening of a new performance center in the city. There is a movement forward continually like a sequence of unique spokes on a wheel. It is a fitting end-piece to a provocatively personal program of orchestral gems.

Steven Mackey has harnessed his own idiomatic way with *Time Release*. You must of course listen for yourself but I suspect and trust that you will find it all well worth your listening effort as I have. I find that the more I listen the more this music stands out as another way to go, a personal orchestrality that is Modern but not predictably that. All the better for it. I very much recommend you listen closely at least several times and map out your own conclusions from the experience. Bravissimo!