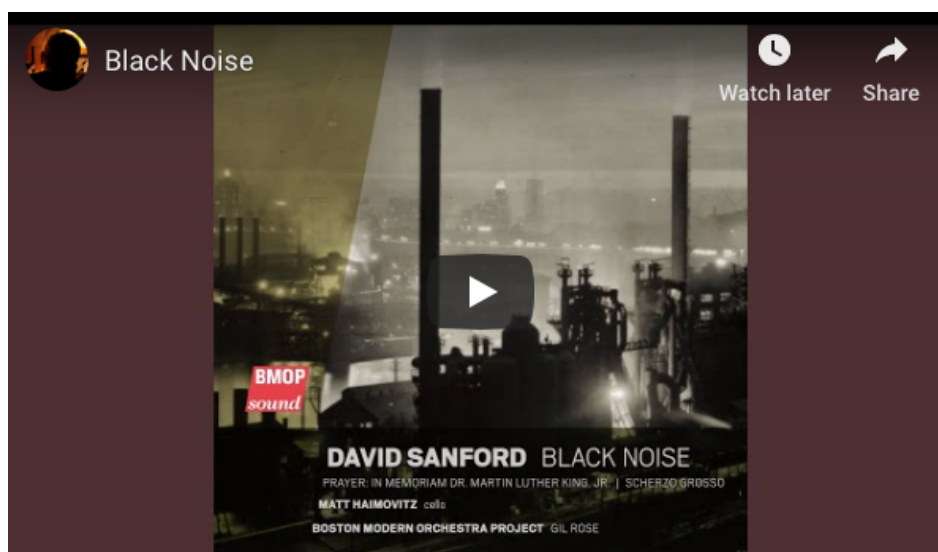


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THAT DECISIVE MOMENT

Beloved Composer: The Week in Classical Music

April 13, 2019



As the Miller Theater at Columbia University begins to wrap up its 30th-anniversary season — a Composer Portrait concert featuring David T. Little’s music comes next, on Thursday — I’ve been thinking about some of the best concerts I’ve heard there in recent years.

One particularly fine show was in October 2007, when the composer David Sanford conducted his own big band ensemble, the Pittsburgh Collective. Both raucous and exquisitely poised, the music was decked out with some broadly perceptible reference points — including traces of classical modernism, jazz improvisation and the attack of punk. Yet it was the composer’s way of combining these surface-level traits that proved most memorable.

While Mr. Sanford’s music is not heard in New York nearly enough, a taste of his more recent work is available, thanks to a set on the Boston Modern Orchestra Project’s label. The 11-minute work that gives the album its title, “Black Noise,” is a 2017 piece commissioned by the orchestra, known as BMOP.

Less immediately boisterous than some of what Mr. Sanford has written for his own band, “Black Noise” lavishes time on an investigation of spectral trends in contemporary classical harmony. In his liner notes, Mr. Sanford cites composer Fausto Romitelli as an influence, as well as the “harmonic world” of Pierre Boulez.

Boulez’s “Notations” for orchestra don’t feel all that far away at points. But other of Mr. Sanford’s stylistic predilections also push themselves to the fore, including a frenzied section in the middle, which is helped along at first by authoritative, pizzicato bass lines, suggestive of Mr. Sanford’s appreciation for Charles Mingus. *SETH COLTER WALLS*