

Concert Reviews and Features

AMERICANS - ZAPPA, KIRSCHNER, BOLCOM, CHAMBERS, ADAMS – AT TANGLEWOOD

Tanglewood, MA; July 21, 2002

Six concerts in this year's Festival of Contemporary Music at Tanglewood were devoted to "American Music of the Past Fifteen Years." The first of those six was an entertaining and occasionally maddening mix of orchestral and chamber works, with a set of hauntingly gorgeous song settings by William Bolcom at the center.

Two movements from Evan Chambers's "Cold Water, Dry Stone," inspired by the composer's 1995 trip to Albania, summoned an Eastern feel (in the way Hovhaness, say, gets Eastern). The chamber ensemble featured marimba, clarinet, bassoon, alto sax, violin, and piano, and the opening allowed a single melody to flow from one instrument to another with breathtaking transparency, a characteristic that imbued the piece as a whole.

"The Cold Water of Himara" takes a Moldau-like trip without getting clichéd; the second movement, "The Road to Gjirokaster," whirls into a jagged dance without getting any too happy. Conductor Daniel Alfred Wachs led the nimble-fingered forces with accomplishment.

One of the great joys of a concert like this is not knowing what to expect from each piece; in every case, the performances were superb and, though anger, confusion or annoyance can creep in from time to time, disappointment was nowhere to be found.

B. A. Nilsson