

The Toy Piano Composers: *Artistic Differences*. Saturday, February 2, 2013.

The Ensemble: Now in their fifth season, TPC are "a collective of emerging composers" banding together to present new works in a smaller ensemble (the core group is six members).

The Venue: I always feel a little out of sorts going to Yorkville, but Heliconian Hall (located behind Hazleton Lanes) was a gem of a venue. The spot was new to me, but the former church has been home to the Heliconian Club (for "women in the arts and letters") since 1923. "Homey" and "cozy" come to mind, and I felt immediately relaxed in the intimate space, which doesn't fit much more than a hundred people in the audience.

The Music: All of the night's pieces were new compositions that were inspired by works of art. Most of the artworks were paintings, although Christian Floisand's *Sylvian Swocery* responded to a piece of concept art from the *Sword & Sworcery* video game and Chris Thornborrow's "Walking" was inspired by Ryan Larkin's famous NFB animation of the same name. For many, both the original pieces and the composers were on hand to give a sense of what they were responding to in the works.

All six were engagingly composed and performed, but I was especially taken with Patrick Murray's "Skin and Bone", which conveyed the inner glow and fleshy tactility of Ognian Zekoff's large-scale oil-painting of a pair of hands.

The Vibe: In "playing" music, especially self-serious art music, the sense of "play" is often lost. Even while respecting the integrity of the compositions, TPC kept a playful vibe throughout, extending to the introductions and chats with the composers.

It was noteworthy that this was the only show of these three I saw to feature woman composers — something that shouldn't be an oddity in 2013. That was one more thing that made me feel like this isn't just source-material for the academy or museum — the vibrant exuberance here was more akin to how I feel at a regular gig. The group's DIY spirit makes them the indie rock band of the New Music scene, and they should be embraced as such — this is a group that's ready for an audience outside the cloisters of the classical crowd.

The concert program was also photocopied DIY-style, and the venue has a bar at the back, so you can enjoy a beer while the music is playing. There were also free snacks on offer at intermission. As mentioned, the introductions to the pieces were well-integrated into the program itself.

Coming up: TPC's season concludes on March 23, 2013 with *Threshold*, with the group playing host to Montréal's Ensemble Paramirabo. I was quickly converted to being a fan, and look forward to seeing the group again. TPC offer very affordable \$10 advance tickets, so this is the group to see for anyone wanting to get their feet wet in contemporary composed music.