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Music

MUSIC REVIEW

Terezin Music Foundation opens onto the new

By Jeremy Eichler | GLOBE STAFF NOVEMBER 14, 2012

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Simone Dinnerstein performing at Symphony Hall on Monday night.

The Czech-Jewish composer Gideon Klein's Duo for violin and cello is the tumultuous work of a young composer, full of sharp angles and pungent harmony, Romantic in its expression, modern in its language. At Monday night's Symphony Hall gala concert for the Terezin Music Foundation, violinist Si-Jing Huang and cellist Sato Knudsen laid

into the piece, giving it a vigorous and earthy reading — until the music came to an abrupt end, trailing off in the middle of a violin phrase.

Klein left the work unfinished, as TMF executive director Mark Ludwig explained from the stage, when he was transported to Terezin in December 1941. Barely in his 20s, Klein went on to play a central role in the concentration camp's fabled musical life before being transferred to Auschwitz. He perished in the nearby Fürstengrube camp in 1945.

One could easily imagine a worthwhile role for TMF simply in advocating, as it does, for wider recognition of composers like Klein, who were silenced by the Holocaust. And yet TMF's work has reached far beyond its commemorative and educational mission by bringing new music into the world through active commissioning. It would be hard to overstate the impact of that bold approach for a small organization of its kind, as it brings a generative dimension to the very act of remembering, and opens up TMF to the music of the present and future. Composer Nico Muhly, the recipient of the organization's most recent commission, put it succinctly in a program note when he called TMF's commissioning projects "a radical answer to the silence."

As part of Monday's gala concert, Muhly's new work, titled "You Can't Get There From Here," was premiered by pianist Simone Dinnerstein. Like much of Muhly's music, the new piece draws from disparate streams, fusing episodes of steady pulsation and post-minimalist gestures with ideas inspired by Renaissance or Baroque music, in this case drawn from the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book. At first the two streams inhabit different worlds though they seem to collide and cross-pollinate as the piece intensifies and the work's emotional temperature rises.

Dinnerstein gave the new commission an insightful and boldly drawn first performance, preceded by music of Bach (Partita No. 1) and Schumann ("Kinderszenen"). Those two works received rubato-heavy and highly personal accounts that seemed to say more about the interpreter than the music being played.

Several of the evening's highlights came during a brief appearance by soprano Dawn Upshaw and her long-time recital partner, pianist Gilbert Kalish. Upshaw, who starts a

run of performances with the Boston Symphony Orchestra on Thursday night, offered a handpicked bouquet of Ives songs, including a drolly theatrical rendition of “Ann Street” and glowing accounts of “Down East” and “Songs My Mother Taught Me.” Upshaw took poetic measure of each work and Kalish matched her at every turn. In “The Housatonic at Stockbridge,” he gently grounded the weightless vocal line with delicately placed, mist-enshrouded chords.

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