

Review *Music*

Abstract sounds, lots of rhythm

By David R. Adler

FOR THE INQUIRER

Bowerbird, a Philadelphia-based experimental music series now in its second year, likes to demonstrate how broad “experimental” can be.

One show in late May began with saxophone, video installation and spoken word; then came sets for solo lute and solo trombone; and finally — what else? — a thrash-metal trio.

Friday at the Rotunda, however, was what Bowerbird’s executive director, Dustin Hurt, called “more jazzy than usual.” In place of percussion sculptures and banks of electronic equipment, there were unamplified double basses and woodwinds. But the music was just as uncommon.

The first act was a Philadelphia duo, with Gene Coleman on bass clarinet and Evan Lipson on bass. Coleman is a recognized composer of new classical music; Lipson, the younger of the two, is a member of Coleman’s Ensemble Noamnesia and other groups.

Playing two freely improvised pieces, they evoked a landscape of strange sonorities and timbres. The music had no defined tempo, but an abundance of rhythm. There were fragments of flowing melody, surpassingly dissonant.

There were also elements of raw, crowded sound, with Coleman huffing into the mouthpiece and Lipson summoning raspy overtones with his bow. At times these exchanges gave way to moments of near-total stillness.

Reuben Radding, one of New York’s top avant-garde improvisers, followed with a solo bass performance that was yet more abstract. Setting out at a near-inaudible level and building for roughly 15 minutes, he created an array of nuanced aural effects using “extended techniques,” brushing the bow vertically across the strings, pinging the bass’ wooden exterior with the bow’s end, even going at the instrument with a short red stick.

Shot x Shot, a young Philadelphia-based quartet, closed the evening with a more structured concept. Comprising two saxophones (Dan Scofield, Bryan Rogers), bass (Matt Engle) and drums (Dan Capecci), the group played two scored pieces, “Oh No” and “Triple Double,” as well as an untitled free improvisation with a similar flavor. Aggressive in attack but restrained in volume and rich in texture, the band combined technical exactitude with a loose, out-of-tempo approach.