
WOODSTOCK TIMES**Standing O's at Maverick**

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By Leslie Gerber

Maverick Concerts' music director Alexander Platt is very high on the contemporary music ensemble Antares, and you could tell by his enthusiasm when speaking about the group that he expected something exceptional from its concert at the Maverick hall on August 15. He was right. It was a long and, in some ways, demanding program, but extremely satisfying.

It's easy to take the music of George Tsontakis for granted, since he lives nearby and is a frequent presence in our musical life. But he is so much in demand these days that he had to be away when two of this major works were played at maverick. And he's not just a local composer; he's one of the outstanding living composers, period. Antares began its program with pianist Eric Huebner taking on the challenge of Tsontakis's *Ghost Variations*, based to some extent on a theme from Mozart. Tsontakis includes an amazing variety of materials and styles in this work, but it's completely cohesive and quite powerful. Huebner's sound was a bit too clanky in the top register of the piano, but I could easily forgive that in exchange for the power and expressive clarity of his playing.

Tsontakis's *Eclipse*, like the *Ghost Variations*, runs about half an hour. It was inspired by the sight of an eclipse of the moon seen from his home. This music, even more than the *Ghost Variations*, demonstrates Tsontakis's affinity for the work of Messiaen. It's also got some jazz in it and plenty of other suggestions and hints of styles. But it's all Tsontakis, and as far as I could tell the performance by Antares – which has recorded the work – was superb.

Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* is, in my opinion, his masterpiece. Many of this composer's works, especially the longer ones, alternate sections of powerful inspiration with places where the composer seems to love his intensity and focus. Not this one. I suppose it's easy to keep one's focus when you're writing while a prisoner of war, but whatever the cause, this work is one of the 20th century's greatest. I've never heard a bad performance of this music, which seems to attract only musicians who can play it. But this one might have been the best I've ever heard. Among the many memorable details was the clarinet playing of Garrick Zoeter, who began his solo movement, *Abyss of the Birds*, playing his instrument softer than I would have thought possible (and I used to play the clarinet, badly, when I was in high school).