

http://www.capitaljournal.com/stories/103003/ent_review.shtml

CJOnline Entertainment / The Topeka Capital-Journal
CJOnline : Entertainment :

Review -- Scrap Arts Music: Recycling pays musical dividends

By Chuck Berg

Special to The Capital-Journal

LAWRENCE -- Before hauling your junk to the driveway for curbside pickup, you might take another look and cock an ear to your discards' latent musical potential.

That is precisely what Scrap Arts Music director Gregory Kozak did several years ago in his hometown of Vancouver, Canada.

Seeking a distinctive sound beyond the standardized instrumentation of such conventionalized genres as jazz and rock, Kozak salvaged a medley of plastic pipes, hoses, coils, plumbing fixtures, two-by-fours, pop cans, steel bowls and aluminum drums, transforming them into a futuristic array of eye- and ear-grabbing sound generators.

The result of Kozak's quest is the aptly named Scrap Arts Music, a lively percussion quintet which proved Tuesday night at Lawrence's Lied Center that recycling can pay rich musical dividends.

In addition to devising the group's sonically and visually arresting instruments, Kozak serves as Scrap Arts Music's composer, choreographer and artistic director. However, unless one perused the credits in the program, one would have been hard-pressed to name the leader on the basis of the group's performance.

Indeed, each of the group's members -- Scott Bishop, Malcolm Shoolbraid, Sarka Kocicka, Simon Thomsen and Kozak -- had equal and ample time to strut his or her percussive stuff. Still, the group's principal effect was the result of its elaborate and precisely choreographed rhythms and movements.

In "Engine of the Future," for instance, the fivesome reached a thunderous climax abetted by close-quarter maneuvers worthy of the Rockettes and a cascade of sounds produced by such ingeniously named thump-machines as "annoy-o-phones," "hour glass drums," "gymnastic mat paddles" and a "junk-on-a-stick."

In the course of wending its way through an often astonishing program of Kozak originals graced with such titles as "Synthesoid Plasmatron," "Annoyophonia" and "Conundrum," the group demonstrated more than mere virtuosity.

Indeed, in soundscapes ranging from the explosive "Artillery Peace" (featuring instruments fashioned from huge artillery shells) to the delicately deployed tones of "Scrapology," the group essayed an impressive musicality in which melody and harmony and tonal color had as great an impact as percussion.

Scrap Art Music also brought a funny bone, which resonated with appropriate good and goofy cheer in Satie-esque miniatures, such as "Whorlies." Musical good humor also abounded in the more elaborate "Assembly Required," in which various lengths of exhaust tubing were constantly reconfigured to produce various pitches and timbres, including several "impolite" sounds that the Mel Brooks of "Blazing Saddles" would have heartily endorsed.

As evidenced by the delight of a host of youngsters, placing Scrap Arts Music in the Lied's Kansas Family Series proved sanguine. For adults, the quintet's emotionally stirring music made the point that percussion can be more than mere stomps or bangs on cans.

Chuck Berg is a professor at The University of Kansas. He can be reached at cberg@ku.edu.

© Copyright 2003 CJOnline / The Topeka Capital-Journal / Morris Communications