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## Classical music review: Creativity, variety, fun -- well done, Copernicus

BY ALAN BECKER

Project Copernicus, founded just last winter, launched its first series of concerts over the weekend. The ensemble of musicians mostly in their 20s hopes to attract a younger group of concertgoers to keep serious music alive at a time when a youthful presence is conspicuously absent from the scene.

The dedication, execution and creativity of music director and conductor Chung Park and his mostly New World Symphony musicians prove that there can be few more worthy projects. If the gratifying attendance for Saturday's program at mostly-full St. John's United Methodist Church in Miami Beach is an indicator, Project Copernicus might well be on its way to success.

With "From the Land of the Buddha," the ensemble presented an Asian-inspired program by four young composers -- three of them Asian Americans. All were present to introduce their music, and two participated as players.

With *GEN*, Ryojiro Sato takes a pointillistic approach in depicting "the random afterimages that remained in my sights in the dark room with my eyes closed." This cutting-edge music, as abstract as a Kandinsky canvas, defies characterization in Western terms, as form and development take no part in the creation. The harp plucks occasionally. The slurs and glissandos of strings and winds create nightmarish images. Percussion slams its way into the texture, and crotales bells conjure wailing sounds when scraped by a bow. The piece succeeds as an essay in sound and color.

Steve Danyew's *Lhotse* for two saxophones depicts the wonder of experiencing the high mountain range in Nepal. Both players use extended techniques such as micro tones, blowing multi pitches and tapping on the keys. Melodic fragments try to break free but are thwarted. Danyew and Jason Kush handled the ascent with vigor and determination.

*L'ours Chinois (Chinese Bear)* by the ensemble's double bass player Randy Wong is a throwback to kitschy Hawaiian music. With claimed influences of Fritz Kreisler, Maurice Ravel and Martin Denny, Wong has created a pastiche style reminiscent of Don Ho with a substantial solo part for violinist (and soon to be wife) Helen Liu. All is melody and rhythm, and all goes down easily. The audience loved the piece's sense of fun.

Angel Lam's expressive *Empty Mountain, Spirit Rain* is a heartfelt depiction of sorrow on the loss of her grandmother during her kindergarten years in Hong Kong. The delicacy and the cumulative effect of this profound writing were well realized by flutist Ebonee Thomas who performed the tricky shakuhachi bamboo flute part on her modern alto flute. The piece has been taken under wing by Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Project and has been performed at Carnegie Hall, Tanglewood and abroad.

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