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MUSIC REVIEW | 'BEYOND THE MACHINE 7.0'

Sounds and Visions, Auguring Tomorrow

In recent years a few American orchestras and opera companies have tried introducing video elements to the experience: close-ups of the conductor, or the solo oboist, or the soprano singing Mimi.

These tentative experiments must seem antiquated to the young musicians and composers at the Juilliard School's Music Technology Center. For seven years the center has presented annual concerts of new works involving up-to-date computer and technological resources. This year's free three-day festival of electronic and interactive music, waggishly called "Beyond the Machine 7.0," and subtitled "The Eye/Ear Collaboration," began on Wednesday night in the Clark Studio Theater, a black-box space in the Rose Building at Lincoln Center.

Projected visuals were crucial elements of every piece. So as the pianist Vicky Chow played the opening work, "Digits" by Neil Rolnick, close-ups of her nimble fingers and leaping hands were projected in split-screen images. But as the music built in intensity, the projection design by Luke Dubois became increasingly elaborate, with images subdividing into neat rows of mini-screens and blurry abstractions.

Though the images were kind of cool, I was much more riveted by Mr. Rolnick's teeming piece and Ms. Chow's brilliant playing. The music began with churning eruptions in the piano's low register, then built into spiraling volleys and skittish "wrong note" arpeggios. Snippets of dance rhythms and an elemental theme, like some Dies Irae motto, intruded. As Ms. Chow played, isolated pitches, brutal chords and rippling passages were picked up by microphones and processed through the computer to extend and enhance the live piano sounds. It all made for an exhilarating interactive piece.

Ms. Chow also performed "Hetz," a shorter work with audio composition by Andreas Weixler and visual composition by Se-Lien Chuang. At first the work sounded uncomfortably close to New Age meditation music, with ocean waves and whooshing winds and images to match. It was rescued in its middle section by a pugnacious atonal outbreak on the piano.

Yui Kitamura's "Awaumi" for solo violin, with projections by Mr. Dubois, took musical phrases that could be heard as far-out Ravel and, through a computer, wildly fractured them. Patrick Doane was the compelling violinist. The projections, with shadowy images of Mr. Doane against swirling watery backdrops, were rather corny, even though this handsome violinist looked good in close-up.

Kenji Bunch's "Ghost Reel" for violin (Ann Miller) and viola (Erin Wight), sounded like an attempt to find common ground between Appalachian fiddle music and Indian ragas. Steve Reich's undulant "Tokyo/ Vermont Counterpoint" pitted the marimba virtuoso Michael Caterisano against recorded marimba tracks, accompanied by an original film by Kirsten Kelly and Adam Joyce with cross-cultural scenes of urban and small-town life: street corners, children in a playground, shirtless skateboarders.

Axiom Ensemble, Juilliard's newest contemporary-music group, played the final two longer works. John King's "Trilogic Unity," with the agile soprano Charlotte Dobbs as soloist, scored for an eight-piece electrified ensemble, was stylistically all over the place and a little amorphous. Still, it was fun to hear Ms. Dobbs intoning repetitions of words lifted from recent news reports, like "Libby" and "lies" and "lapses."

Edward Bilous's "Lucid Dreams," for 18 players (who had to set up their music stands and chairs amid a clutter of cables), was a brassy, fitful work, like some high-tech riff on big-band music, including a vocal part for Lori Cotler. In this case, the visual element was integral: a striking film by David Norman offered overlapping images of a sensual and body-twisting dance choreographed by Alison Chase. And close-ups of alluring young dancers are a lot more captivating than, say, close-ups of a typical maestro in a concert hall.

The final presentation of "Beyond the Machine 7.0" is tonight at 8 p.m. in the Clark Studio Theater in the Rose Building at Lincoln Center, 165 West 65th Street; free.