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Dialogues on photos, poetry and music

Nancy Bauer State of the Art

Some dialogues I've had recently: With Ron Vincent who sent me 18 delightful photographs of dewdrops on cobwebs. He was moved to send them to me by reading my column on the photos of Thaddeus Howlonia.

And over tea with Travis Lane who answered my column question on why young poets are inspired by John Ashbery. Among other reasons, he is light-hearted, while many other well-known poets are serious and difficult.

More dialogue: I'd been hearing from Janet Hammock about the premiere of Martin Kutnowski's "Bosquejos for Two Pianos". She invited me to attend. It was in the form of a lecture to Kutnowski's St. Thomas University students, held in what is now becoming a familiar venue to me, the music recital room of McCain Hall. Pianist Hammock commissioned the work, its creation also supported by pianist Bertrand Giraud and an Arts New Brunswick Creation Grant.

Dr. Kutnowski described the form of the work, its five movements inspired by five different Latin American dances. He played a recording of a bit of each dance as performed by a well-known musician. He and Dr. Hammock would play a part of his piece that had been so inspired and both would talk about it. He gave a hand-out with songs in each genre, in Spanish and in an English translation. These words were gloomy, but the notes and rhythms of the recordings were jolly.

The two pianists then played the whole piece. It's charming, in the modernist argot but also with danceable rhythms and lovely melodies.

Dr. Hammock is a professor emeritus of music at Mount Allison University. She has often commissioned works, and for this, as well as for her teaching and for her own performing, she was one of 50 musicians who received the distinguished "Ambassadors of Canadian Music" award. Dr. Kutnowski, from Argentina, has also had a distinguished career, now as Director of Fine Arts at the university.

For the third time in a week I was back in the McCain music recital hall. This time it was with the group "Resonance"—bassist Andrew Miller and violinist Danielle Sametz, both members of Symphony New Brunswick, and their guest pianist Peter Mears. Miller had devised an engaging programme, "Drama and More Drama." Each of the nine pieces was connected to drama in some way. Three had been used many times as movie scores. One of these is Arvo Pärt's minimalist "Spiegel im Spiegel" in a medieval mood. The last few years I've learned a great deal about this composer who Miller described as a favourite.

The trio played "Duo for Elizabeth", a dialogue written by the bassist's father Michael, this performance dedicated to the late Edith Miller, his mother. A comic work, "Wager at the Eldorado Saloon" by Jon Deak, involved acting, mumbled words, sound effects, dialogues, as well as actual music. It was a lot of fun, and I could tell the musicians were having fun too. Another such amusing piece was "Eggs and Baskets" by Tom Johnson, with Mears reading the script and Sametz and Miller playing on the theme of "don't put all your eggs in one basket." Miller is a good teacher about these modern pieces, articulate and passionate, dialoguing with the audience.

Jane Tims brought me a copy of her latest book of poetry, *in the shelter of the covered bridge*, a companion piece to her previous book *within easy reach*--also without capital letters. Chapel Street Editions designed this lovely book as a twin to its predecessor. As in *within easy reach*, *in the shelter of the covered bridge* combines poetry, local history and natural history, with Tims' own delicate drawings. About the Stillwater Bridge over the Digdeguash River, Tims writes, "I am the wind/of the Digdeguash/shaped by valley walls//I race trout/lift ferns/blow quick kisses/under the wings of butterflies//I am the wind/spoken in the beams/of the covered bridge/slipped into space/between/boards//I rattle the roof, the reeds/vibrate with my breath". She makes me want to go cross these bridges.

My neighbour David Boles showered me with an abundance of natural Christmas decorations he'd scrounged from roadsides, woods, and bogs: white pine boughs, bog and service berries, two kinds of sumac drupes, and red dogwood sticks. They're the kind of Christmas trimmings my parents delighted in, so I was especially moved. Soon my daughter will be home, and we will use these to decorate together.

Many volunteers decorated our church elaborately with memorial pots of poinsettias, wreaths and evergreen swags, two crèche scenes, special candles, tapestries and a Christmas tree. A photograph from the balcony showed off its beauty.

Adorning your home or building is such a light-hearted activity, invoking the creative spirit as well as the spirit of the season. I'm not sure about this, but like music and unlike writing and painting, it's a better creative pursuit when at least two people participate together.

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