

Friday  
Oct 5, 2007

# A varied connect

**MUSIC** Monique Copper played short pieces interspersed with recitations of poetry that echoed or enhanced the music

**M**onique Copper favours a multi-disciplinary performance, built around a theme. Her recent recital, "Water" (presented by International Music and Arts Society), paid tribute to her country, Holland: veined with waterways, and its lower-lying flatlands constantly threatened by sea incursions, water has seeped into Copper's creative imagination.

Many 17th Century Dutch painters reflected their country's strong maritime tradition; one of them, Ludolf Bakhuizen, is Copper's ancestor. She also found many wind, water, and snow-based compositions in her repertoire. These various connections inevitably swept Copper into "expressing as a pianist, my love for the surroundings in which I grew up, live and work."

Against a video projection that covered the backdrop of the Alliance Francaise stage, Copper played short pieces, interspersed with recitations of poetry that echoed or enhanced the music. Extreme close-ups of water were near-abstract, being allusive, rather than literal references to the music. Water pictures flowed into each other: bubbling with raindrops, heaving with the sea's waves, Debussy rippling and shimmering, and a turbulent wake churning to Chopin's "Barcarolle".

Debussy himself was greatly interested in the relation of music to other arts and even set Mallarmé's poems to music. Appropriately, the recital opened with Debussy's Reflections in the Water, mirror-images of trees dissolving into wind-riffled surfaces. However, Copper's narrations over the music were not always intelligible, indistinctness



**BALANCING ACT** Copper played staples for conservative audience, and contemporary pieces

PHOTO: SAMPATH KUMAR G.P.

therefore proving detraction. This was most noticeable in the encore: in an innovative juxtaposition, Copper read out a Water Board's public notice of dos and don'ts while playing Gyorgy Kurtag's "Homage to Tchaikovsky". What verbal snatches were audible, were most amusing.

The programme contained sufficient staples to keep the conservative section of the audience interested: primarily the three Chopin pieces, though Debussy, Ravel and Bartok are borderline Modern. However, the inclusion of pieces by contemporary composers was not as well-received.

To most Western music audiences in India, contemporary music sounds like broken glass, never mind Philip Glass. They prefer recognisable classical and romantic favourites; their

baffled reaction to modern and contemporary music is frequently adverse, even unflattering. New movements explore and signpost the artists' changing milieu, challenging the audience to abandon known and familiar territory, demanding of them open-mindedness and imagination. Avant-garde artists wrenched familiar rudiments out of accepted frameworks, then fracturing and reassembling them into disturbing complexities. However, emotion often gets lost in that 'clever' process of intellectualisation; which is perhaps one reason why some post-modernist art bolsters itself with other-media add-ons.

When music, the most abstract art form, is devoid of melodic invention, conventional harmonic contexts and deep emotional appeal (indeed, even feelings are

rarely evoked), many find imagination and analyses are insufficient substitutes.

However, as Picasso's work now no longer appears as savagely deformed as it was when he first revolutionised painting, Copper hopes that, with increased exposure to contemporary music, it may find the same acceptability. She finds children are particularly free from preconceptions. Much of her work concentrates on contemporary music programmes for children, combining music with art and stories, which children love.

The Forum for Teachers of Western Classical Music gained useful instruction at Copper's lecture-demonstration, Styles and Techniques of 20th Century music. She showed how enjoyable it could be to teach contemporary music to children; it also did much to overcome the resistance to new music that is prevalent even among professionals.

In her master-class for children the next day, she proved her point that children are much more open to innovation and novel listening experiences. They enjoyed playing clumps of notes with fists or forearms, or trailing the keyboard with glissandi, like drawing a favourite toy on a string behind one. Minimalism was demonstrated with a Waltz using only the keyboard's eight Cs; such 'games' are not only fun, they also give novices a sense of accomplishment and incentive.

Copper enlivens her innovative and collaborative presentations of music with her infectious enthusiasm, and might well win friends and influence audiences for such contemporary multi-media presentations.

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