

# NEW YORK MUSIC DAILY

## Paul Dresher Brings Haunting New Music and New Instruments to Roulette

Paul Dresher's Double Duo made a stop at Roulette last night that included a shattering world premiere played by Twosense, and the New York debut of a couple of brand-new instruments. Joel Davel played the marimba lumina – a digital marimba whose library of samples includes a full symphonic percussion section, and is enabled to mix and match a vast number of timbres beyond the instrument's typical acoustic range. Dresher and Davel aired out the epic sonic capabilities of the quadrachord, which is basically a giant (i.e. twenty-foot) bass lapsteel. The results spanned the emotional spectrum, from nerve-wracking angst to joyous musical acrobatics. It was one of the best New York concerts of the year, without a doubt.

Variations on an eerie theme circled uneasily and then gave pianist Lisa Moore the opportunity to deliver the gamelan-esque loops of Dresher's Double Ikat, Part II with a Bach-like precision, joined in tight choreography with Davel on the marimba lumina and Karen Bentley Pollick's alternately dancing and atmospheric violin. A pervasive Philip Glass influence became clear as the trio took it down from an insistent peak to an elegaic outro, Pollick low and affectingly austere.

Dresher's Glimpsed from Afar paired the composer on the quadrachord with Davel's marimba lumina. It was sort of a demo of everything the instruments can do together – swoops and dives, sustained sheets of sound, shivery dynamic shifts, ghostly lulls, sly oscillations, joyous percussion samples bursting from the marimba lumina, pointillistic loops and finally a tightly percussive yet deliriously jaunty outro with both players on the quadrachord hammering away on mallets, a cymbal and other percussion objects placed under the strings. Hypnotic yet explosive, much of it sounded like a more concise take on what Michael Gordon did with Timber, his longscale work for amplified sawhorses, a few years back.

The highlight of the concert was Moore and cellist Ashley Bathgate playing the world premiere of Dresher's triptych Family Matters. Packed with dark chromatics and ominous passing tones, it was a study in contrasts, all of which eventually took on an aspect that ranged from funereal to downright macabre. The duo built subtly out of a dancing theme to a lively but equally agitated series of rises and falls throughout the first part. Then it fell to Moore to keep the steady, almost baroque rhythms going as the piece slowed down, Bathgate employing a viscerally aching vibrato and a chilling sense of longing and loss as its morose dance wound down. Moore took Mood Swings, a harrowing dirge, to a menacing, modal minuet at its peak, then Bathgate brought back a relentless, inconsolable angst with starkly resonant, stygian, sometimes microtonally-tinged lines that were nothing short of harrowing.

The concert wound up with Martin Bresnick's Fantasia on a Theme of Willie Dixon, which turned out to be simply the minor third interval on which his song Spoonful is based. You know it: Howlin' Wolf did the original; the Allman Brothers made it famous. Dresher's hovering electric guitar lines mingles with Moore's impressionistic piano and Pollick's jaunty cadenzas and simmering sustain while Davel served as a one-man percussion section on the marimba lumina. It was like early ELO with more challenging tonalities, Moore delivering its most unsettlingly delicious, glimmering interludes.