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## Drumfest delivers heartfelt lament

By STEPHEN PEDERSEN Arts Reporter

Drumfest 2006 paid tribute to its late and sorely lamented founder Matthieu Keijser on Saturday night in a packed St. Matthew's United Church on Barrington Street..

The nearly four-hour event featured Mi'kmaq Nation's Brian Knockwood and his son Bryson, who invoked the heartbeat of Mother Earth on frame drums, Acadia University's percussion ensemble's thundering timpani and Samba Nova's rhythms of Brazil.

The church was jammed with friends and fans and lovers of the drums. The program boasted 19 soloists and ensembles, from Jerome Thomas playing an extended reggae solo on trapset to the 10-member percussion ensemble from l'Universite de Moncton, conducted by Michel Deschenes.

There was no intermission during the 8 p.m.-to-11:45 p.m. concert and yet time in all its meanings — duration, tempo and rhythm — flew by.

Yes, it was too long. Yes, it is probable that if Keijser had been pacing about backstage he would have worried about the length of the program, as Drumfest co-ordinator Mark Adam told the crowd he would. But drumming has a way of numbing fatigue with euphoria. If we had thought about it, we would have had to admit to being tired as midnight approached. But we were too happy to care.

The stage crew helped by their efficiency in clearing set-ups and preparing the stage for the next act. They always knew where everything was without having to hunt for it.

Marimbist Pam Paton stunned the crowd with her energetic jigs and reels as she bobbed in and out while her mallets flew over the tone bars. Marsha Coffey backed her up on djembe and conga and Pam Mason was on double bass.

Ken Shorley demonstrated Turkish Darabuka, his fingers eliciting small, energy-packed explosions of tone. Dani Oore played saxophone and didgeridoo with Mark Adams collaborating on drums in a set which segued neatly into the astonishing acrobatic urban dancing of three of the Stepbruthaz, which included sudden freezes with legs impossibly knotted together and even spinning like a top while doing a headstand.

There were other dancers: Kym Butler tap-dancing on top of a cajon (a box drum played while sitting on it); the African-inspired dancing of Mas Cencerro; and two flamenco companies—Maria Osende, flambouyant and flowing (though musically compromised by an overdriven bass), and Las Ninjas with Megan Matheson marrying hand gestures and sudden, defiant poses to the passionate anguish of Maral Perk's voice singing the intense, traditional Seguiriya.

The Dalhousie percussion ensemble brought the crowd to its feet with the climax of the second movement of Trio Per Uno by Serbian composer N. J. Zivkovic as Ben Duinker, Mark Morton and Craig Jennex faced each other across a table upon which a horizontal bass drum was surrounded with bongos and brake drums. The tight interaction as the music got ever faster and more complex was as exciting to watch as to hear.

Mark Adam recorded marimba and his own voice to overdub tracks in increasingly active layers of song and mallet work. This sort of performance, in which one musician builds up his or her own accompaniment with the aid of modern electronics, is becoming more popular and with good reason. It is a fascinatingly creative process.



Marimbist Pam Paton stunned the crowd with her energetic jigs and reels at Drumfest on Saturday evening. (Tim Krochak / Staff)

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Vibraphone/marimba virtuoso Arthur Lipner took the playing to a whole different level with an awe-inspiring solo on The Song Is You, which he dedicated to his friend Matthieu.

Lipner belongs to that rare category of master player that includes Art Tatum and Oscar Peterson and like them, he packs his improvisations with cascades and fountains of notes till silence is driven away. It's impressive, of course, very much so, yet it is the art of the showman in spite of its extraordinary instrumental mastery and jet-speed spontaneity that turns us all into passive spectators rather than active listeners who take part in the creation of the music.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

" What are you hiding? No one ever asks that. "

Sarah Vowell

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