

quality constantly, particularly in the orchestration of instrumental music, vocal music, and spoken word. Patches of silence and relative quiet in one mode overlap with or correspond to similar attributes in another mode. The audience sometimes experiences the multiple "voices" of all of the sounds playing together, and at other points is aware only of the concentrated and deliberate sound of Beckley's speech. We are aware, too, of her words, and of the significance language has in our understanding of the sounds and sights of the performance.

In some respects, *The Aquarium* calls to mind other performances merging music and visual forms in performance, notably the large-scale works of Laurie Anderson and Meredith Monk. But while Anderson's stagings of music, sound, and visual mediums dramatically emphasize the power and the poetry of her words, and Monk's spectacles of dance, music, and film generally eschew words altogether, seemingly transcending language, Beckley's piece draws our attention to the interaction of ways of creating meaning. Literal and figurative elements of language play off each other, their meanings touched by abstract sounds and reframed by actions and tableaux.

Near the end of the performance, a brightly lit T-shape serves as a double phone stand ("no booths/just two phones on a pole") that is the central image in a song called "No Messages." The loneliness and isolation that permeate *The Aquarium* come together in this story of messages lost, misdirected, and abandoned. Acknowledging the "undelivered letter from the Friar to Romeo," the narrator finds a lesson. "I know the end to that story," she says, "It's a compelling argument for intervention." But the strongest movement toward communication comes in the piece's final song, a sensual love song to the possibilities of light. Evoking at once the romantic glide of a ballroom dance under a starry sky and the fantastic quality of a world brilliantly lit by endless high-tech innovations—the lights of the bus stop, the streets, and the halogen torch—"Edison Night" illuminates the intimacy the narrator shares with her imagined characters and with her audience. "Now, come lie beside me, Thomas Edison," she and her alter-voices croon, "I'll tell you about my shadows, / and you can tell me all about the light."



*Listening Subjects: Music, Psycho-analysis, and Culture*

By David Schwarz. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.

—Review by Thomas Lavazzi

A hot—though not humid—early June afternoon in Central Park. In the open field, backed by bleachers, chairs packed close, Buckwheat Zydeco has just come on the elevated stage. In his black-vested suit, gold and diamond pinky ring (the finger that trills the keys), full head of glossy styled hair above deep blue shades, he's doing well. "We're gonna take you back to the swamps..." he tells us in heteroglossic creole French. Rippling, pop-fast rhythms of the accordion. Dancing in a field in Baton Rouge: no sophisticated wireless electronics; a few beat-up but very powerful amplifiers: Baudin, Andouille, crayfish, and beer. Brackish bayou sweat glistening at the temples, eye sockets. Listening is moving, unselfconsciously. Memory of a feeling... tears—the usually clear eye watering, washing away emotional pollution...

Here in New York, Buckwheat is accompanied by what sounds like a pickup band of studio musicians—the trumpet too slick, a celluloid squealing, too bright—Las, Los (Vegas, Angeles) stage show jazz, sax not raspy enough (not from Louisiana, or even Louisiana), LA. But—the eye clearing—any moment is always what it is.

And yet there are moments when the studio-trained accompaniment stops, when the accordion and "washboard" player sound apart, the latter raking what from my distant below-stage seating I can still imagine to be metal spoons across the ribbed metal breastplate—just the sound of that unsynthesized percussion scraping under the rapid accordion notes. As the two walk forward from the mics (though the umbilical of the accordion still runs back to an amplifier on the present stage, not that original moment of hearing...), as they come forward, toward my listening position—as recorded music closeups come to the front of the listening plane of a speaker—and the rest of the band drops away, and the beat quickens, and I forget, or, "remember to forget" that there is a

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