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NEXTET 3/24 Concert Report

Doc Rando Recital Hall

Attending the NEXTET concert at the Doc Rando Recital Hall was not what I initially expected, but in the best possible way. I had done some research beforehand, mostly looking at the program notes and reading up on a couple of the composers, some of whom I learned are professors and students at UNLV. That little bit of context helped a lot. For example, knowing that one of the pieces was influenced by Stockhausen made the chaotic-sounding piano piece make a lot more sense. Dr. Timothy Hoft played this section masterfully, and while at first it sounded like a complete mess, it clicked when I realized it was based on the Fibonacci sequence and followed the coda of Stockhausen's own work. My expectations were completely flipped—this wasn't your standard classical concert with predictable harmonies or a clear melody. It was something entirely present, experimental, and atonal.

What stuck out to me were the sounds I had never heard before at any concert. One performer plucked the actual piano strings inside the instrument, which was something I've only seen on YouTube or heard about in modern composition theory. There were weird but intentional silences, sharp bursts of notes, and even physical movements that seemed to merge with the music itself. It was like watching the performers breathe life into these abstract pieces. I've been to concerts before, but I've never really listened like this—where you're kind of forced to absorb the textures, gestures, and physical energy of the performer just as much as the music.

The venue added a lot to the atmosphere. Doc Rando Recital Hall is kind of grand with the old organ taking up the background of the stage. It doesn't really get used, but it's there like a reminder of music's tradition, which contrasts these experimental 20th and 21st century pieces even more intensely. The hall's acoustics were amazing, and the silence in the room when the pieces ended was thick in the best way. The audience was super respectful and totally still throughout the performances, only clapping once the performer hit full silence and bowed. You could feel that everyone knew we were hearing something unique.

The performers' body language also made a big difference in how I experienced the concert. A lot of them moved subtly with the music, which made it feel like they were more connected to what they were playing. Before each group performance, the players would breathe together, kind of like a silent count-in, and then jump in at the same time. It was a small detail but felt like a meaningful ritual that helped them sync both mentally and emotionally. There wasn't always a conductor, but when there was, they made eye contact with the players often, guiding the energy of the ensemble more than just the tempo.

The program notes were a hidden gem. At first glance, some of the piece titles didn't mean much—like *Vasija de Barro*, which translates to “vase of clay.” But reading further, I learned that it referenced an Ecuadorian painting symbolizing a mother's womb, which gave the music a deeper emotional and cultural layer. Another piece with the wild name *Potted Meats and Princely Wines* turned out to be all about British foods—something I never would've guessed just from listening. That kind of background made the performance more fun to interpret and definitely gave the pieces more meaning.

Overall, I was surprised by how immersive the concert was. I didn't expect to be so pulled into this type of music, especially since it's not traditionally melodic or easy to follow. But that unpredictability and raw experimentation made it feel alive. The space, the performers' engagement, and even the thoughtful program notes all contributed to a live experience that just wouldn't translate the same through a recording. I'm honestly glad I went.

