

MUSIC / *Incantation* at the Glenn Gould Studio in
Toronto on Sunday

BREAKING VOCAL LIMITS AND PSYCHIC ONES TOO

MODERN Day Divas, a three-concert mini-festival showcasing new vocal music, concluded at the Glenn Gould Studio on Sunday night with an evening of "extended vocal music" entitled *Incantation*.

Broadly speaking, "extended vocal music" implies vocal sounds that lie outside the parameters of the *bel canto* operatic tradition. Sunday's concert, which was sponsored by CBC Stereo's *Two New Hours*, Tapestry Music Theatre and the Glenn Gould Studio, brought together elements of native/pop music (Anhai), avant-garde theatre (Michele George) and Queen Street Cool (*Dreaming of Beauty*).

The young vocalist/guitarist Anhai and percussionist Jurij Konje made a strong impression their four-song set. In *Secret Angel*, Anhai's voice continually wove around, and escaped from, the growl of her gutsy, percussive and chromatic guitar playing. In the irresistibly rhythmic *See You See Me*, she hijacked words from the realm of sense into that of pure sound, until it was impossible to distinguish between "nonsense," often animalistic sounds (and possibly words in a foreign tongue) and English words.

The most spectacular use of extended voice was Last Chant Soul Loon, a structured improvisation by Toronto-based actress/singer Michele George and saxophonist/composer David Mott. George, who trained and toured with Peter Brook's International Centre for Theatre Research in Paris, took us through a vocal and emotional journey of staggering range. Most of the text seemed a free flow of "nonsense" words of an Italianate cast. The "music" ranged from gut-wrenching wails to deep belly-laughter to horse-like neighing; from sounds of sexual ecstasy to modal melodies reminiscent of synagogue chant. Most importantly, the performance seemed to break not simply vocal limits, but psychic ones as well — to invite the listener to be utterly, ecstatically and subversively, alive.

After George's cathartic performance, it was hard not to find *Dreaming of Beauty*'s high-tech fusion of voice and electronic samplings trendy but slight. *Incantation* will be broadcast on CBC Stereo's *Two New Hours* on March 13, at 9:08p.m.

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