

## The Church of Beethoven: Fifth Street Praise

*by Criss Jay // Sept 9, 2011*



How much music has been written for trombone and violin? It's the kind of esoterica given a fantastical rendering by the Folk-Reimagined project, conceived and performed by the electro/acoustic duo of trombonist Steve Parker and violinist Molly Emerman. Their website page, with an almost deliberately droll text-message or AP wire brevity, suggests little of the project's extravagance, its tropical electric musings on Boss Nova, or the kind of rapture and mischief in their Klezmer derivations. There's slapstick virtuosity recalling a cattle auction along with heart-like pulsing out of digital delays and random time decays. Structurally sophisticated, technically demanding, the pieces, some commissioned by Parker himself, combine an assured, classical practice with folk's soul and wit.

Avi Magahi's "Parallel Worlds" for solo violin conjured Romanian dance, perhaps the liturgical voicings of the Ashkenazi. Emerman, who is 1st violin of the Austin Symphony, played impulsive and impetuous, making frequent trills and leaps.



The Schumacher Marsch written by Daniel Schnyder I already alluded to. Wildly contrapuntal but ever on the march, it's a rousing tour de force in miniature. Think of Stephan Grappeli and a Dixie Land swing band of Zurich shoemakers chasing each other round through a Swiss Clock, while Parker's trombone bass line periodically provides old sturdy baroque authority.

Perhaps the most digitally haunting, because of sensuous pre-recorded vocals and infectious rhythms of shakers, was Ian Dicke's *Musa*. But the morning probably belonged to Steve Snowden's "Ground Round," a trombone and Macbook Pro collaboration that turned the Church of Beethoven into an auctioneer's stall for Nebraskan cattle. Through both its pre-recorded effects and Parker's considerable skill, we witnessed a Sunday transubstantiation of lowing cows, slow squealing gate hinges, and roaring trucks. I think I heard the knock of a gavel coming down to finalize a sale. Parker, currently an artist in residence at Austin's Blanton Museum of Art, was at the center with an uncanny double-triple-flutter-tongued impersonation of the near unintelligible vocalizations of "Randy," the world champ of cattle auctioneers. Here, "folk" re-imagined is not only a complex crossing of homely grass-fed tunefulness and modern antic anarchy. The recorded material takes the music into the realm of visual narrative, a brash Americana — not that different from Thomas Hart Benton — infused with the primary colors of place, work, dust and slaughter.