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The Calder Quartet featuring Andrew W.K.
 [(Le) Poisson Rouge; New York, NY]
 [11-15-2008]

Andrew W.K. has spent his 2008 opening a new venue in New York (Santos Party House), producing a Lee Perry record, and giving readings of children's books. He's made some time for performing as well, but his recent gigs have not exactly been full-bore, "I Get Wet," bloody-faced raunch fests. Solo piano shows, improvisational experiments in art museums, and impromptu Tom Petty covers have been more the norm, and, to that eclectic list, Mr. W.K. can now add a collaboration with the Calder Quartet.

The product of this collaboration went down at (Le) Poisson Rouge and consisted of a blend of new classical works, improvisations, Phillip Glass, and favorites from *I Get Wet* and *The Wolf*, performed with the help of a varied assortment of pre-recorded material, makeshift percussion and, most intriguingly, Ensemble Robot's Bot(())cello (a robotic, MIDI-controlled, single-stringed, quasi-percussion-y thing). The program was almost as strange as it looks on paper. The tone of the performance ran the gamut from W.K.'s goofy "Brandenburg Hey Hey Hey" (which started as a Bach piano solo and ended as a disco jam), to Christine Southworth's austere Honey Flyers for quartet and Bot(())cello, to a frenzied and climactic dance fest on W.K.'s show-closing "Long Live the Party." Miraculously, this all managed to form some kind of a cohesive experience.

It's difficult to say why a well-respected string quartet would want to play "Party Hard," if you approach the question from a purely musical level, but this collaboration went further than that. Fun is the main element of both Andrew W.K.'s persona and musical style, though the more difficult to pin-down "energy" is probably second, and the energy and sense of enjoyment that the Calder Quartet instilled was definitely a sign that they were influenced by more than W.K.'s sense for apocalyptically simple melodies.

Of course, a collaboration needs to go two ways, and there were moments where the gravity of a classical concert seemed to get through to W.K. At the end of an improvisation, he performed with piano, voice, and the Bot(())cello; the rumble lapsed into something in between George Crumb and black metal that seemed oddly fitting.

But the overwhelming feeling, which seems common to all Andrew W.K. projects, was one of possibility and growth. The Calder Quartet has a long way to go before they can inspire ecstatic embraces and dancing, and W.K. is still years away from being able to produce anything close to the breathless serenity the Calder showed in their performance of Tristan Perich's "Interface." But everyone's trying, and everyone's inspired, and that's really the best anyone can hope for.

by **Doug Schrashun**
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