

Southern Circuit Presents 'Apparition of the Eternal Church'



Southern Circuit has a new venue – the Arts Council of Beaufort County's Performance Space. On Friday, February 1st, filmmaker Paul Festa will present his film "Apparition of the Eternal Church." In this award-winning film, 31 artists and thinkers listen to a ten-minute piece of music through headphones and describe what they hear. What all but a few don't know is that the music is Olivier Messiaen's monumental organ work Apparition of the Eternal Church. A devout Catholic and the organist at the Church of the Trinity in Paris, Messiaen wrote this music to send listeners to the heights of spiritual ecstasy.

In actuality however, Festa's listeners respond in wildly different fashions. Some do respond with the sort of religious emotion Messiaen expected; others see strange narratives about death, sexuality, and persecution wrapped up in the seemingly religious work. Still others find the experience to be an excruciatingly painful ten minute version of Dante's Inferno.

In an encounter that is part conversation, part battle, and part revival meeting, artists including authors Harold Bloom and Lemony Snicket, filmmakers John Cameron Mitchell and Sandi Dubowski, drag star Jackie Beat, and the Scissor Sisters' Ana Matronic – put the violent contradictions of Messiaen's music into words. The result is a collective interpretation improvising its way through an aesthetic landscape defined by paradox. Resolution comes up against eternity, eroticism against asceticism, spiritual ecstasy against physical torture. Together, the music and its interpreters conjure something like what William Blake famously called "the marriage of heaven and hell."

Filmmaker and writer Paul Festa studied violin at the Juilliard School before graduating in 1996 with prizes and honors from Yale College, where he studied English. His essays have appeared in Nerve, Salon, Best Sex Writing 2005 and Best Sex Writing 2006. Apparition of the Eternal Church, his first movie, has screened at film festivals throughout the United States and Europe, winning several prizes including "Best North American Independent Feature Film" at the 2006 Indianapolis International Film Festival. Currently revising his first novel, Paul lives in his hometown of San Francisco with his boyfriend James and their dog Ziggy.

The opening Short on February 1st is documentary Dick-George, Tenn-Tom, directed by Gideon Kennedy: In 1971, President Richard M. Nixon visited Mobile, AL for 104 minutes, during which time he shook 100 feet of hands, lost a cufflink, and shared a stage with his biggest political rival, Governor George Wallace. Dick-George, Tenn-Tom is a sardonic look at their rivalry, the creation of the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, and the attempt on Wallace's life less than a year later.

Southern Circuit #4 of 6: Apparition of the Eternal Church by filmmaker Paul Festa, Fri. Feb. 1st, 7:30pm ~ at ACBC's Performance Space, 1111 Boundary St. in uptown Beaufort. Tickets at the door, \$7. Next film on the circuit: Kamp Katrina by David Redmon.