

## MUSIC: MEREDITH MONK IN 10-YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

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Meredith Monk has been celebrating her 20th year before the New York public this season - with "The Games" at the Next Wave Festival last fall, with showings of her films at the Whitney Museum beginning in a few weeks, and with a mostly musical night at Carnegie Hall on Thursday.

Miss Monk has been busy all these years filling in the moats that traditionally protect music, dance and the dramatic arts from one another. Thus Thursday's event - a 10-year retrospective, with a new work in progress added in - was not simply to listen to but to see: singers, dancers and players clad in striking jumpsuits and startling shades of green, all happily crossing from one medium into the next.

At the start, there was Miss Monk alone on a darkened stage to sing unaccompanied "Songs From the Hill," then Miss Monk with three colleagues and two electric organs in "Turtle Dreams," Miss Monk with a large chorus and small ensemble in the new "Book of Days," and finally with five others in "Dolmen Music."

As a singer and a creator of sound images, she has remarkable control and range. She can hoot and belt, soar upward like a coloratura soprano, mimic nature cleverly and slide in and out of pitch relationships with great assurance. "Songs From the Hill," with their vivid allusions to the outdoors and to the basic emotions of human intercourse, deal in noises, not words, and consist of short repeating phrases that are newly embellished with every repetition. The same pattern ruled the ensemble singing of "Turtle Dreams," expanding here into simple antiphonal effects and little contrapuntal exchanges.

"Book of Days" was the biggest piece in sheer size, using both a cluster of soloists and a 21-member mixed chorus. Still, "Dolmen Music" seemed the most ambitious music of the evening. The simplicity of Miss Monk's musical style often veers close to the simple-minded, but in the latter work there were ear-catching alterations of phrase length and some enchanting nasal nattering as well.

Listening to all this and watching her listeners do the same helped one to think more clearly on the secrets of Miss Monk's success. One of these secrets, and maybe the overriding one, is her courage to be different - and the ability to express that difference with fluid technique. Miss Monk came to prominence at a time when the breaking of inhibition and the overthrow of the normal patterns were values highly prized and cultivated. She, in other words, makes sounds in public that we would make in private, if at all. She stretches and breaks the traditions of the concert and theater format, and this, I think, has titillated our sense of recklessness.

What seemed to fascinate her audience on Thursday, indeed, were not the musical beauties in her creations but the strokes of audacity - the vocal extremes of shrieking, clucking and growling, the spectacle of a cello being not only stroked but gently attacked by drumsticks as well.

Taken alone as an expression of power or beauty, on the other hand, the music just does not add up to much. Miss Monk's wide embrace of many artistic fields may well express freedom and breadth, but if these compositions are fair examples, it may have diluted her powers as well. Her imaginative sound imagery, in other words, has entered fresh and exciting territories, yet I wonder if their user has shown the depth to really occupy them.

The mid-1980's and the mid-1960's are very different animals, and the lust for change, for revolution and for innovation at any cost has largely eased. Inadvertently, Miss Monk's concert on Thursday may have said something important about her relevance both to the past and to our particular moment in social history. For this celebratory occasion, at any rate, Carnegie Hall was only half full.

On stage with Miss Monk in a variety of functions were Andrea Goodman, Robert Een, Naaz Hosseini, Ron Roxbury, Mary Shultz, Nicky Paraiso and Nurit Tilles. All were bright and smoothly professional performers.