

Garden of Memory summer solstice concert June 21, Chapel of the Chimes LOCAL LIVE It's unusual to wait in line at a mausoleum. Mourning tends to be a solitary thing, and that's usually the only reason to go to something like a mausoleum, to pay tribute to the dead. Designed by Julia Morgan, the Chapel of the Chimes columbarium is a fascinating building in Oakland's tony Piedmont District. With a cemetery up the street and thousands of ashes housed here, this stretch of Piedmont has more dead than living.

On this day, however, the columbarium was the site of a summer solstice concert put on by New Music Bay Area, and it was far from morose and solitary. People in shorts and Hawaiian shirts milled about, and kids ran around.

New Music shows are usually small. One might expect a few dozen attendees, tops, most of whom are also musicians. The solstice concert series began in 1995, and this show included more than 30 musicians tucked into various corners on the three levels of this Byzantine structure. Other than players in the main hall — Terry Riley, Sarah Cahill, Oogog — the attraction of the concert was seeing how musicians adapted to the space and its particular acoustics. I found myself working backward, entering on the Howe Street side and winding intestinally down three flights of stairs and garden alcoves to the very crowded main entrance. I caught a snippet on the veranda of William Winant's percussion group, a quintet including high-school-age wood-block players. It was refreshingly low-tech compared to other installations to come.

John Bischoff's "Loving Kindness" room featured a formation of speakers and bells hooked up to a laptop in another room. The mixture of analog chiming with computer-generated sounds worked well and drew attention to the space's meditative potential.

The musical pinnacle of the event was Walter Kitundu's set in the Saint Matthew corner. His instruments consist of modified and rebuilt turntables combined with a harp — the strings resonate on both the record needles and an output that is run through delay pedals. Kitundu calls them phonoharps, which could easily have been viewed as sculptures were it not for his dexterity in coaxing melodies from them. Between tapping out beats on the phonoharp's body, plucking and hammering its strings, and scratching the vinyl with the stylus, Kitundu multitasked in a way that made his music exciting and physically immediate in its causal use of technology. It felt like an improvisation focusing on melodies and beats, standing out from the drone-heavy lineup elsewhere.

Another installation was so removed from its creator that he didn't even tend to it. Joe Colley's pile of cardboard boxes in the Garden of Saint John was filled with tape recorders on loops and various handheld tone generators. It was a fantastically informal cluster that seemed at odds with the vibe of a columbarium, harshing the sentimentality of death by emphasizing the cheapest materials. In their own way, though, these sound machine ghosts in cardboard coffins brought a humor and darkness surprisingly absent from the rest of the mix.

Karen Stackpole and Krystina Bobrowski also gave a strong performance. Stackpole bowed and prodded giant gongs and smaller singing bowls and cymbals while Bobrowski played a seaweed whip and three glass chambers filled with water. A system of tubes controlled the ever-changing water levels in the three chambers, which were amplified and played like glass harmonicas or just shaken to create percussive waves. They managed to keep the longest captive sitting audience despite — or perhaps because of — their doom and gloom vibe. (George Chen)