

# Contemporary program sounds a serious note

By William S. Goodfellow

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CONTEMPORARY MUSIC CONSORTIUM with mezzo-soprano Julie Reynolds, flutist Jane Morrison, trumpeter Rick Morrison, violinists Barbara Scowcroft, Madeline Schatz, violist Jeffrey Wagner, cellist Ellen Bridger, pianist Marjorie Janove, organist Ricklen Nobis, percussionists Ron Brough, Douglas J. Wolf, Beesley Music Co., Feb. 3, 8 p.m.

There was scarcely an empty seat in the house for the second concert of the Contemporary Music Consortium Tuesday at Beesley Music Co. — still not a huge audience numerically, but an enthusiastic one.

The subject of this program: music by local composers Joel Feigen and Stanley A. Funicelli and California's Robert Greenberg and Elinor Arner. If to my ears the out-of-staters came out on top, at least that means their music was worth hearing. And worth the trouble to import.

Greenberg, currently a lecturer in the UC-Berkeley music department, was represented by his "Breaths, Voices and Cadenze" for string quartet, here Barbara Scowcroft, Madeline Schatz, Jeffrey Wagner and Ellen Bridger.

Written in 1981, the piece is openly gestational, the "Voices" growing out of the "Breaths," with their anguished slides and emerging motives, and the "Cadenze," with its heightened lyric awareness, growing out of the "Voices." Nonetheless I find it a remarkably sure-footed work, purposefully constructed — i.e., it moves the material at the same time it explores it — played here with feeling and acuity.

In developing the piece, Greenberg admits he was influenced by Bartok. Feigen, on the other hand, cites among his influences in putting together his "Epitaph-Fantasy" for trumpet, piano, organ and timpani (1981, revised 1987) the anti-war film "Gallipoli." Tuesday he expanded that to include "Platoon." "It's all there," he told the audience, "the horrific battle scenes, the peace and quiet of the jungle, a burst of machinegun fire."

In this instance the bursts are provided by just about everyone, thanks to sharply accentuated writing for the

trumpet (Rick Morrison), timpani (Douglas J. Wolf) and piano (Marjorie Janove). It's a harrowing trip, as far as it goes, with some interesting instrumental effects (the trumpet and organ, for example, traditionally memorial instruments, are here employed in terrifying fashion) and profited from a performance of power and concentration. But there is little respite, and, despite its martial tread, little sense of direction. But maybe that was the idea.

Similarly Funicelli's "Oscures" (1987), a reference to the disquieting Mediterranean winds of that name. Again, the prevailing mood is a serious one, dark and unsettled, with a heavy reliance on dissonant structures developed from what the composer calls "interlocking consonances."

Scored for flute, violin, viola, cello and piano, it is a work of varying densities but not greatly varied motion, and that despite the presence of increasingly eerie, agitated writing for the strings. I find it initially interesting but it seems to go on too long — a

hard thing to find oneself saying about a piece that lasts barely nine minutes. But again, maybe that was the object — like the *oscures*, we wish it were over without really knowing why.

No such problem afflicts "Lockerbones/Airbones," a 1983 collaboration between the San Francisco Conservatory of Music's Elinor Arner and poet Ursula LeGuin, best known for her science-fiction writing.

A strangely affecting setting of five poems — "Anger," "The Child on the Shore," "Footnote," "Hard Words" and "For Katya" — its color is predominately gray, illuminated by gradual shifts of light and shadow. But the maintaining of that base tone is what makes the shifts so telling — like the mezzo's monotone delivery in "Hard Words," it's not really a monotone, any more than the harmonic focus is ever really fixed.

It also strikes me as a difficult work to co-ordinate, with its disjunct writing and exotic percussion (mostly sparingly employed). But conductor Madeline Schatz apparently kept it all together, as she had the Feigen and

the Funicelli. For her part mezzo Julie Reynolds came to grips with the work textually and musically, with some especially vivid underlinings.

All composers were present save Arner, due in part to the death of her mother. Which, as it happens, the second poem deals with — another example of life imitating art?

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