

## BERKELEY CHAMBER GROUP

## Boulez Gets a Double Play

By Joshua Kosman  
Chronicle Staff Critic

The Berkeley Contemporary Chamber Players' Monday night concert in Hertz Hall offered listeners not one but two chances to hear Pierre Boulez' beautifully fragmentary chamber work, "Eclat."

If that sounds like the fabled second prize of two weeks in Philadelphia, think again. Music that sounds disjunct, arbitrary or simply tedious on a single exposure often can reveal unsuspected depths when the listener gets another crack at it, this time with some knowledge of the landscape. This is

especially true for a piece like "Eclat," whose score leaves many details of execution to the discretion of the performers; thus each new performance provides a slightly different take on the composer's invention.

A group of 15 players, capably led by Daniel Weymouth, performed the 10-minute work with considerable dexterity. The score's sparsely arranged profusion of detail, the convincing way it generates and uses musical energy, and its deployment of recognizable dramatic landmarks were all brought home — tentatively at first, persuasively the second time around. In a perfect world, double performances of new or difficult (and sufficiently brief) works would be the norm.

The rest of the concert ranged, as such concerts generally do, from the intriguing to the mundane. The three movements of Robert Greenberg's "By Various Means" (1983) pursue a single thematic 12-tone row through a series of variation techniques. (Two of the movements are titled "Passacaglia" and "Chaconne," suggesting that Greenberg has discerned a distinction between the two terms that continues to elude mainstream musicologists.)

The composer probably has more faith in his constructive techniques than I do; what piqued my fancy in this score was the lovely vein of lyricism in the first two movements, and particularly the rhythmic vitality of the final Chaconne, with its buzzing ostinato fig-

ures. The piece received a first-rate performance by clarinetist Evan Ziporyn, violinist Nathan Rubin, violist Duncan Johnstone and cellist Carol Reitan. Martin Herman conducted.

Ziporyn opened the concert with "Ixor," a beguiling three-minute work for solo clarinet by Giacinto Scelsi, who died this past August. The piece is gently, beautifully inscrutable, a sparsely melodic assemblage of fourths and major sevenths with a tonal center that is consistently hinted at but never insisted on; there are also a couple of apparently gratuitous foot-stomps. Ziporyn provided the music with an oh-so-smooth melodic flow.

Tenor Marc Lowenstein wasted his talents on three songs from Lennox Berkeley's 1965 cycle "Songs of the Half-Light," to texts by Walter de la Mare. The music is watery sub-Britten stuff, displaying that composer's sentimental streak without his anger or bite. Like Peter Pears, to whom the cycle was dedicated, Lowenstein has a gift for managing a high tessitura with sweetness and clarity; he often made the music sound better than it is. Albion Lawrence was the guitarist.

John Chowning's unenticing tape piece "Phone" was played with the house lights completely off; the result felt unnervingly like a planetarium show. Vittorio Fellagara's "Berceuse" (1980), performed by flutist Laura Schwendinger and pianist Katherine Heater, rounded out the program.