

Quartet Makes Child's Play of Election

By Joshua Kosman
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Fresh from the exertions of deciding the fate of the free world, an appreciative audience gathered in the Green Room of the Veterans' War Memorial on election night for a concert of recent American music presented by Composers, Inc.

The "Election Night Special" concert by the New York-based Alexander String Quartet offered the world premieres of works by Peter Lewis and Robert Greenberg and pianist Lois Brandwynne played music by Elinor Armer, Andrew Imbrie and William Bolcom.

The concert reached its peak with Greenberg's "Child's Play" (1988), a skillful, witty and thoroughly enjoyable evocation of the almost demonic energy of juvenile games. Instead of the nostalgic reminiscences of Schumann or Ravel, this is more a clear-eyed depiction of the outer, rather than the inner, world of childhood.

The first movement, entitled "Games," sets the four players loose in a breathless round of chases, races and giddy mimickry; in the work's transparent ensemble textures (splendidly rendered by the Alexander), the nature and progress of each new game is clearly audible.

The movement also captures the cycle of flagging and renewed energy that is distinctive to children's play. In one delightful passage, for instance, the players pause briefly, winded from their activities, and then begin to inch up in unison toward a tonic note, regaining strength with each step. The very instant the tonic is reached, the players hurl themselves back into the fray.

The middle movement, "Sogni d'Oro" ("Dreams of Gold"), is a gentle and remarkably lovely reverie, stocked with undulating melodies that pass peaceably among the four instruments. The final movement, entitled "Dances," returns with even more frenzied abandon to the unison melodies of the opening. The quartet gave a performance of vigor and polish.

Lewis was represented by "Night Lights" (1983), a 10-minute work in two connected movements. The score has some isolated moments of beauty, such as the array

of richly tinged harmonies in the first movement and especially the long, soulful cello melody (stunningly played by Sandy Wilson) in the second. But on first hearing, its formal intentions seemed vague and its musical effect diffuse.

Brandwynne's offerings culminated in six selections from Bolcom's "Twelve New Etudes," which won him the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for

Music. She met the technical and interpretive challenges of these exercises fearlessly, adding a tinge of excitement.

Brandwynne opened the concert with two short works, Armer's "Thaw" (1975), and Imbrie's stirringly rhetorical "Daedalus" (1986), written to commemorate one of the casualties of the "Challenger" explosion.