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## Xtet Presents New, Newer

As is its wont, Xtet, the nearly decade-old Los Angeles-based chamber group with the pithy, peculiar handle, took the opportunity of its Monday Evening Concert to delve into things new, and newer. In the first half, there were pensive works by little-known composers for intimate, varied groupings. Tonalities swerved to either side of the consonance spectrum.

The rueful cast of the first half, at the L.A. County Museum of Art, didn't really need the apologia offered from the stage by talkative bassoonist John Steinmetz (who would do well to remember that too many words get in the way of the notes).

Opening the evening was Chinese-born Bright Sheng's brief, attractive "Three Chinese Love Songs," sung with restrained luster by soprano Jacqui Bobak. On Mexican composer Mario Lavista's effectively funereal "Responsorio," Steinmetz issued plaintive, gently dissonant statements framed, musically and spatially, by dual bass drums and tolling tubular bells.

David Maslanka's "Tears" proved to be an alienating and alienated stew of ideas, including neo-romanticism, replete with pounding piano octaves.

Primarily, Monday will be remembered as a rare night that the lowly vibraphone got its overdue attention. The group gave a gutsy world premiere of Robert Greenberg's "Trial by Fire," a concerto for vibraphone and chamber ensemble which, as the composer explained in pre-performance banter, was his "best approximation of David Johnson—intense, mercurial, jazzy."

The music was that, and a bit more. Throughout, a sense of

yearning and/or whizzing tension underscored the music, in search of an apparently unattainable resolution. In the process, the ever-able Johnson got a physical and interpretive workout. The alternately driving and deconstructing outer movements required a will-to-hurtle muscularity and a certain unsettled emotional quality, while the icy middle movement found the vibraphonist wielding a bow and floating eerie glass harmonica-like tones.

In all, this is an exciting, restless piece, throwing a meaty bone in the repertorial direction of an instrumental underdog.

—JOSEF WOODARD