

[A LOT OF NIGHT MUSIC]

Good Vibes

BY ALAN RICH

For anyone given to straying off beaten paths, it was a pretty good week. XTET was back at the County Museum with a fine new work. Wires was back in a new venue. Lutoslawski's music was back at the Philharmonic, which also applied a new twist to Beethoven's evergreen Violin Concerto. Even the L.A. Mozart Orchestra supplied some high adventure, in the form of another of those amazing early Haydn symphonies where nothing happens exactly the way you expect.

XTET, founded eight years ago by 10 studio players in search of something to play more challenging than the John Williams noodle-noodle that maintained their bank accounts, was down to VII-TET (plus guests) this time, but their program did not skimp on substance or delight. Jacqui Bobak sang Bright Sheng's colorful (but by now overfamiliar) *Chinese Love Songs*; John Steinmetz played Mario Lavista's *Responsorio*, a quiet, moving elegy for solo bassoon; David Maslanka's *Tears* continued the mournful mood, a moment or two too long.

Best of all was *On Trial*, in its world premiere, a concerto for vibraphone, with small ensemble, composed by one Robert Greenberg of San Francisco, whom nobody had ever heard of before but should from now on. Greenberg, 40ish, is on the faculty of the San Francisco Conservatory; age and position, you might expect, should lure him toward creating a nice, safe repertory for graduating piano and violin majors to audition with. Instead, he has thrown caution to the winds (and strings and percussion) and created a big, swashbuckling piece for this most unlikely instrument, as if the lowly vibes were capable of as much virtuosic impact as, say, Paganini's violin or Horowitz's piano. Better yet, he has actually given the instrument something to say: violent and temperamental in the outer movements, lyrical and almost tragic in the slow movement (where the instrument is played with a double-bass

bow, creating an extraordinary, haunting sonority). Since his soloist was the stupendously agile David Johnson, XTET's regular man at the kitchenware, he was on firm ground; it all added up to an exhilarating half-hour: brand-new music with brand-new ideas.



XTET: Brand-new music with brand-new ideas

WIRE

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