

## The Pleasing Little Things In Life / Earplay's new music pieces short but sweet

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Big meaty pieces of music certainly have their allure, but there is also something to be said for smaller, more modest works. On Monday night, the new-music collective Earplay offered a nosegay of short chamber pieces in the Forum at Yerba Buena Gardens, and the results were almost uniformly enjoyable.

None of the six pieces on the program -- five of them dated from the current decade -- ran more than 10 minutes, and none seemed intent on making a major statement. The catchwords instead were exploration, mood-painting and exuberant play.

The newest work was David Pereira's "Leaf Storm," a quintet for flute, bass clarinet, violin, cello and percussion that had its world premiere under the sensitive baton of George Thomson. The composer's goal was to capture the sense of turbulence in the title (which comes from a Gabriel Garcia Marquez story), and the music does its work marvelously.

### DARK, SWIRLING TEXTURES

With just a few instrumental strokes, Pereira sets up dark, swirling textures that draw a listener in, then interweaves them with passages of cool stasis. What's most impressive in this five-minute score is the clear sense of energy flux -- you can feel the storm subsiding briefly, then beginning to well up again slowly but unmistakably.

Thomson also led a crisp account of Stephen Blumberg's "Sextant," a deftly shaped score of streamlined beauty (a central episode featuring a dialogue between viola and bass clarinet over tinkly piano accompaniments proved especially captivating).

The number six features prominently, according to the composer, in a score full of six-note melodic figures and sextuple rhythms. Yet this is a rare instance in which that sort of structural device is at once audible and free of gimmickry, thanks to the clarity and appeal of the material.

### AMUSING AND ARRESTING

Tom Flaherty's "Semi-Suite" for solo cello, a piece as amusing as its title and even more arresting, got a fervent, terrifically deep-toned performance by Robin Bonnell.

But the most outright fun came in the final selection, the U.S. premiere of "The Riot" by Stanford professor Jonathan Harvey. This deliriously virtuosic trio for flute, bass clarinet and piano amounts to an eight-minute burst of sustained riffing, with the three participants bouncing musical ideas off one another like pingpong balls.

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The performance by flutist [Janet Kutulas](#), clarinetist [Peter Josheff](#) and pianist [Karen Rosenak](#) -- three of Earplay's founding members -- was brilliantly rendered throughout.

The one weak point among the contemporary offerings was Bun-Ching Lam's "Last Spring," a drab and episodic piece for piano and string quartet. Prokofiev's Sonata for Two Violins, Op. 56, got a skillful, spirited reading by [Katherine Kyme](#) and [Joseph Edelberg](#), without ever giving a hint what it was doing on this program.

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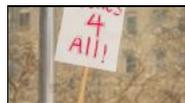
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