

SAN FRANCISCO CLASSICAL VOICE

By Eric Valliere

Earplay's concert at San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts on Monday, February 4 was something of a 20th century primer, representing a host of traditional ensembles, styles and techniques. The foundation of this tradition, of course, is the music of Schoenberg, who was represented here not only by the now-standard "Pierrot ensemble" (clarinet, flute, violin, cello, and piano) but by one piece composed in his memory. Massimo Lauricella of Italy won Earplay's 2001 Composers Competition with his *Eco di un tempo perduto*, originally written in 1997 for the Verdi Theater of Pisa and dedicated to Schoenberg. The work is scored for Pierrot ensemble and utilizes two pitch-class sets (one is based on the letters in Schoenberg's name; together, the two sets utilize all 12 tones of the chromatic scale) as the basis for a musical argument. Lauricella has a confident dramatic sensibility and gives his piece a convincing shape. But his sense of color is somewhat gray, clouding the differences between his opposing materials and leaving one wishing for a bit more sonic definition.

In her *little bits of 2000* Stacy Garrop subtracts the flute from the Pierrot ensemble and creates a piece with five very small movements. Like Lauricella, Garrop is more concerned with pitches than with color for its own sake, but it is her rhythmic imagination and sense of humor that bring the piece to life. One successful exception is the brief "crumbs", an homage to George Crumb — complete with shimmering tremolos and harmonic glissandi — that is mysterious and ethereal, with the clarinet quietly riding a moonbeam in for the final diminuendo. Garrop is clearly a composer to watch. Her music is vital and communicative with a substantive core.

Works for solo instrumentalists filled out the program with mixed success. Richard Felciano's *Prelude* wrestles with the ancient problem of transition (a process he relates to architecture), attempting to flow imperceptibly between his own music and fragmented quotes from Chopin. This performance featured pianist Marja Mutru, who seemed to emphasize the contrasts rather than smoothing them; the piece sounded like something of a rondeau, with rooms of quivering ostinatos providing the refrain, continuously opening out onto patios of new material. *Green Suite* by David Heetderks had violist Ellen Ruth Rose working hard to control the emotional leaps in its most poignantly lyrical passages. But she brought some real fire to the rapid sul ponticello figures and marcato attacks later in the piece.

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**CONTEMPORARY
MUSIC REVIEW**

**Many Shapes
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February 4, 2002

The combination of acoustic instruments and electronic media represented one of the last real musical frontiers of the last century, and will no doubt be further explored in this one. Edmund Campion's *Mathematica III* is, despite the off-putting title, musical and clear, if a bit overlong. It is complex, to be sure; designed for quadraphonic speaker placement, it requires virtuosic precision from the flautist who must negotiate a "gradual shift from one sonic field to another" through a rhythmic obstacle course. Tod Brody managed with a cool grace and surety of tone.

The other winner of Earplay's 2001 Composers Competition was Shintaro Imai, who presented his *La Lutte Bleue* along with cellist Thalia Moore. Using a sound board, Imai manipulated Moore's lovely playing with feedback and other effects described thus, in his own words: ". . . frequency mapping on a time axis based on models of harmonic or inharmonic spectrum data and its gradation, interpolated musical phrases...manipulated via time-varying pitch/interval filter, fractal structure of the piece, and so on." The musical results were nearly as incomprehensible. While experimentation is essential for a young composer and has always been a core ingredient in the exploration of electronica, normally very few of the resultant sounds make it to the concert hall. Shintaro's piece showed sparks of invention, but it had a formless, haphazardly improvised quality that didn't — and won't — wear well.

(Eric Valliere earned his doctorate in composition from New England Conservatory in Boston, where he has also served on the Musicology faculty. He currently serves as Executive Director of the San Francisco Chamber Singers and administers the Noe Valley Chamber Music Series. His critical writings have appeared in *New Music Connoisseur* and on *Andante.com*.)

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