

# Music

[Subscribe to the FT now](#)



- [Home](#) [UK](#) [World](#) [Companies](#) [Markets](#) [Global Economy](#) [Lex](#) [Comment](#) [Management](#) [Personal Finance](#) [Life & Arts](#)
- [Arts](#) [Magazine](#) [Food & Drink](#) [House & Home](#) [Lunch with the FT](#) [Style](#) [Books](#) [Pursuits](#) [Travel](#) [Columns](#) [How To Spend It](#) [Tools](#)

May 21, 2014 5:01 pm

[Share](#) [Clip](#) [Reprints](#) [Print](#) [Email](#)

## Earplay, ODC Theater, San Francisco – review

By Allan Ulrich

A rarely heard George Crumb piece from 1966 was made to seem very fresh



Earplay

Prestige demands that contemporary music organisations justify their existence by filling their schedules with world premieres and commissions subsidised by distinguished sponsors. Less commonly encountered are those groups that also deem it their mandate to explore the vintage music of their own era, works of yesteryear which may be neglected in the incessant push for the new. San Francisco’s Earplay is one of those uncommon ensembles; this week, among the commissions and premieres, the 29-year-old group concluded a season’s survey of George Crumb with the American experimentalist’s rarely heard *Eleven Echoes of Autumn* (1966).

Crumb’s is one of the more distinctive sensibilities in contemporary American music and even if the literary allusions and idiosyncratic notation of his scores befuddle the listener, this composer’s unusual approach to music theatre and his exploration of unusual timbres evoke a sonic landscape in which nothing is alien. To a quartet of piano, violin, alto flute and clarinet, Crumb adds a whistler (Christy Dana) whose duetting with violinist Terrie Baune intoning harmonics fulfils the score’s instruction: “hauntingly”. The pianist plunks sounds from inside the instrument, the wind players utter superscriptions before their ritual promenade around the piano. These musicians made it all seem very fresh.

Of the evening’s two premieres, the more memorable was Reynold Tharp’s Piano Trio, which may, all by itself, restore the primacy of melody to the chamber music format. The composer may evoke influences from the past in this richly harmonised opus, but he speaks in his own voice. There’s a quasi-narrative here, a sense of nostalgia you can sense in Baune’s swooning and sliding, in pianist Karen Rosenak’s short scales which sustain the tension in all the rhapsodising material and in cellist Thalia Moore’s rapturous attacks. It was impossible to imagine a better introduction. Chamber trios in quest of fresh repertoire should take note.

The other premiere, John MacCallum’s *Hyphos*, is thornier stuff. Viola, clarinet and flute, electronically enhanced, begin at the same tempo; the ensuing and inevitable alterations furnish the work’s tension, which seems to taper off before it ends. In pianist Brenda Tom’s superb performance of Vera Ivanova’s *Three Studies in Uneven Meters*, the 2011 Earplay competition winner, the composer renders sophisticated homage to Bartók and Ligeti, Astor Piazzolla and, most persuasively, the chromatic world of Alexander Scriabin. Six minutes of keyboard bliss.

★★★★☆

[earplay.org](#)

Copyright The Financial Times Limited 2014. You may share using our article tools. Please don't cut articles from FT.com and redistribute by email or post to the web.

[Share](#) [Clip](#) [Reprints](#) [Print](#) [Email](#)

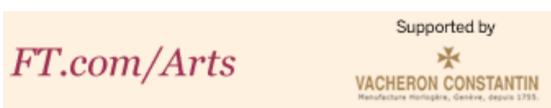
### Post your own comment

To comment, you must sign in or register [Sign in](#) [Register](#)

### Comments



No comments yet



### VIDEOS



### Life & Arts on Twitter

[Follow @FTlifeandarts](#)

More [FT Twitter](#) accounts

### MOST RECENT FROM LIFE & ARTS

- [Literary accounts](#)
- [Guo Jian has Lunch with the FT](#)
- [Splash out in Paris: the Molitor reopens](#)
- [Sole survivors: flat shoes for summer](#)
- [Fun with a 'fatbike'](#)