

CONCERT

Earplay Delights With Unswitched-On Program

BY ROBERT COMMANDAY

The new music consortium Earplay came up with a good one to open its third season Monday in the First Unitarian Church: Look ma!, no machines, nothing plugged in.

The program gave a handsome idea of the life and endless possibilities still available in music written by hand on five line staves and played on regular instruments.

There was even a piece for real clarinet, unaccompanied, that gave its adroit performer, Peter Josheff, the chance to explore personalities — the instrument's, his own and that of the composition.

No trick effects called attention to themselves. Staying with the clarinet's traditional playing style, "Eclogue" (1979) by Allen Brings, a professor at Queens College, New York, offered fresh and expressive music in four short "verses." These were slow and lyrical, flighty, dreaming, and whimsical.

Earplay programs are usually dominated by local composers but this one presented five from around the country while the sixth was Andrew Imbrie of the UC Berkeley faculty, who produced the largest and anchor work. Imbrie's "Dream Sequence" (1986) for octet (string and woodwind trios, piano and percussion) really is a dream piece and comes out the way one wished more dreams would.

Mysterious Connections

"Dream Sequence" starts in intricacy, a continuity of wide-ranging ideas that connect and play in immediately unfathomable ways. The language is familiar and insistently expressive but the phrases come at you unexpectedly, the color profuse. Textures are broken off, and changes come in a fantasy that seems somehow free and unleashed.

A waltz movement follows, one beat to a measure, accents always shifting. It has a sparer effect, somewhat ghostly, the sonorities and melody strikingly defined by tone color. Imbrie's own program note described it as "scherzando," but

conductor, Jonathan Khuner, made it more of a legato, lyrical movement.

Similarly, the final Adagio became more like Allegro, beginning softly and gently with a song for oboe with piano, but turning to a passionate lyricism. The "Dream Sequence" finale again became restrained, simplifying and drawing down to a tender, peaceful and perfect ending.

The program included two vocal works featuring soprano Anna Carol Dudley. "Images, A Winter Calendar" (1980) by Will Ogdon were sensitive settings of single poems by Adelaide Crapsey, e. e. cummings, D. H. Lawrence, and three by Hart Crane.

Ogdon traced elegant yet warm lines with a ranging profile for the singer, complementary melodic parts for the instruments — trumpet, clarinet and flute (used singly in three of the songs) — joined with piano. When using the four instruments, Ogdon's technique (after Webern's) was to use them in alternation to carry successive phrases of one melody. By analogy, the texture and feeling of the pieces was something like that of Japanese painting.

Kerouac's Blues

Dudley sang finely. She opened the program singing a jazz-influenced 1985 setting of "171st Chorus" from Jack Kerouac's "Mexico City Blues," composed by Wisconsin Jerome Kitzke, now of New York. This was a smooth and easy piece for soprano and string bass, Steve D'Amico playing expertly.

Cellist Beth Pearson, with pianist Karen Rosenak, played Ross Bauer's "Evanescence Heterophony" (1986), a lively short work in which the instruments swap, share and echo notes in the melody line. It was a solid, well-written piece of music, which could not be said for one other work, Kamran Ince's "Cross Scintillations" (1986) for piano four hands.

This is an intentional mish-mash of styles, predominantly percussive, showing some influence from the popular field. It included rapid and fierce chord alternations and sustained pedal effects, and some direct playing by hand on the strings. The plucky pianists were Rosenak and Eric Moe.