

SF Chronicle

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Datebook

### **Surprises at Earplay Opener**

Earplay, the local composers' collective, went outside its membership for the opening concert of its ninth season at Cowell Theater Monday night. The group presented a sophisticated grab bag of small ensemble American works, including one with a French connection.

Although all five pieces, by composers Carolyn Bremer, Betsy Jolas, Eric Sawyer, Bruce Taub and Charles Wuorinen, made for an enjoyable hash, Bremer's "Sciamachy" and Wuorinen's "New York Notes," which began and

ended the program, were outstanding.

Bremer said of "Sciamachy" that it was an attempt to relate madness to the creative mind, and the performance by flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano made the listener latch onto that conceit. Karen Bentley's violin represented the mind in creative tumult, a beautiful lyric performance in which her fellow instrumentalists joined in with comments, agreement and disagreement.

In "New York Notes," for the same instruments plus piano, Wuorinen made it apparent that, despite copious explanations in program notes, he is a composer of beautiful music and not the problem-solving mathematician that can be so off-putting in his continuous investigation of serial techniques. Keeping the title in mind, the highly virtuosic three-part work was infused with flavors of the big city, both raucous and ruminative. The helter-skelter rush of the last movement had amazing vivacity.

Pianist Cindy Cox emphasized the melodic underpinnings and appeal of Betsy Jolas' "Piec Pour Saint Germain," unassuming but imaginative music by the American/French composer that worked itself up from the quiet deep to a modest peak of agitation.

The program also included two piano trios performed by Cox, violinist Joseph Edelberg and cellist Sarah Freiberg: Eric Sawyer's Three for Trio and Bruce Taub's Reflections. In its contrast and trading of materials, Sawyer's trio, originally composed for members of a youth symphony, tipped its hat with a jaunty wit.

Taub's Reflections attempted nothing more than a myriad display of intense colors, achieving a fine success in that regard.

— MARILYN TUCKER