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BOTTLEROCK READY TO GO?

Progressive Earplay Unit Roars Through Energetic Workout

March 31, 1999 | JOSEF WOODARD

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New Music ensembles, if they survive to become institutions, constitute a small but feisty sub- classical music. They can serve more than one vital function, surveying music of their time and region, as is the case with the San Francisco-based Earplay, which brought a fresh-tasting pro-

Formed in 1985, Earplay is a sextet of conspicuously fine players, game for the diversity of tas- by the inherently eclectic slate of composers, and with a special ear toward composers from N- California. Monday's concert proved to be a definitively "new" music program, with nary a cor music staple. Plenty of good ideas were bandied about, played well, and with no easy, slick am in the lot.

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Each piece arrived with its own distinct agenda. Chinese-born composer Ping Jin's "Xipi: The Peking Opera" juggles dramatic effects and gestures for violin, cello and piano--Karen Bentley Bonnell and Patricia Plude, respectively--with a keen East-cum-West synthesis. Silence is utili- expressively, punctuating statements that are essentially atonal, except for a brief pentatonic l

In Eliane Aberdam's "Ha Milah," engaging, sometimes sparring dialogue prevails. Focus is als- the notes between the cracks of fixed ones, between the wrenched overtones from Peter Joshe clarinet and the strummed strings of Plude's piano.

Josheff returned with an impressive solo reading of Pablo Ortiz's tango-inspired "Milonguitas of short vignettes also echoing jazz linearity. "Before and After," by David Pereira, opens with climactic spray of notes and works its way sideways through thematic material, like elements of deconstructed and told inside-out.

Closing the show on a fairly riveting note, Richard Festinger's "After Blue" is a cleverly designed showcase for the full sextet, full of hairpin turns and intricate linear puzzle-work. In a language alternately recalls Elliott Carter and Frank Zappa, Festinger's workout makes fine use of the E team, as they navigate an exhilarating, knotty maze of notes and fast-paced linkages.

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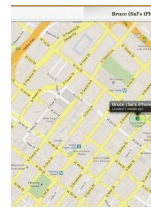
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