



JESSICA BRANDI LIFLAND/SUN

Richard Festinger of Orinda founded "EARPLAY," a group which gives new composers a chance.

Giving young blood some EARPLAY

By Michelle Paisley
FEATURES EDITOR

If Richard Festinger had been a child of the '90s, he might never have become the accomplished composer he is today.

"I think it goes back to Proposition 13," Festinger, a resident of Orinda and a professor at San Francisco State University, says. "Since then there's been very little music in the schools...So many students today don't have the opportunity unless their parents think it's important enough or they're financially well-off enough to afford private lessons.

"Now at the college level, they have very limited experience — and that's a big problem. It's going to be almost impossible to become accomplished after that."

Fortunately, Festinger is part of the solution, not the problem. In 1984 he founded "EARPLAY," a group that champions the creation and performance of new chamber music from the Bay Area. Through concerts, recordings, musical commissions and educational programs, this ensemble of violin, viola, cello, piano, clarinet, flute and percussion offers virtuoso performances of recent works by young and emerging local composers, as well as those of well-established and international reputation.

"When the group started, the philosophy was really that we wanted to encourage composers that were just getting started," he says, "and that still is an important emphasis."

He adds that 40 percent of the programming is by local composers.

However, their next concert will feature Mario Davydovsky, who is among the most influential composers of his generation. He'll present the West Coast premiere of his "Quartetto," at 8 p.m. Monday, Feb. 24 at the Center for the Arts Forum, Yerba Buena Gardens, Third and Mission, in San Francisco.

Also included is the first Bay Area performance of "Quid Pro Quo" by Michelle Green-Willner of Los

Angeles and Richard Felciano's "Palladio," inspired by the palaces and villas of the Italian Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio.

A preconcert conversation with the featured composers will begin at 7:15.

Festinger says there is "some interest" in bringing concerts to the East Bay, but that it's "kind of a slow process," and he's not sure of the response.

"(Originally), we decided San Francisco was the right place to put on concerts," he explains. "That way the group could be the most visible."

Although groups like EARPLAY exist in nearly every major metropolitan area, Festinger says the groups know each other and share a camaraderie.

"We are competitive in a sense that we compete for the same limited sources of funding," he says. "But

rather than a spirit of competition, there's a spirit of more is better.

"It makes me really happy to see other young musicians devote themselves to modern music."

For more information on EARPLAY, call 253-0357.