

Musical earful of Earplay

Earplay. A concert of contemporary chamber music by Bay Area composers, most of whom were trained at U.C. Berkeley. First Unitarian Church, San Francisco, Oct. 1.

By Janet Livingstone

Special to The Montclarion

There is something about hearing freshly composed music publicly performed for the first time that evokes a sense of excitement and adventure, like setting foot on uncharted territory.

A feeling of privilege is particularly strong when the music is being performed by friends of the composers in intimate surroundings: one is in on an "event."

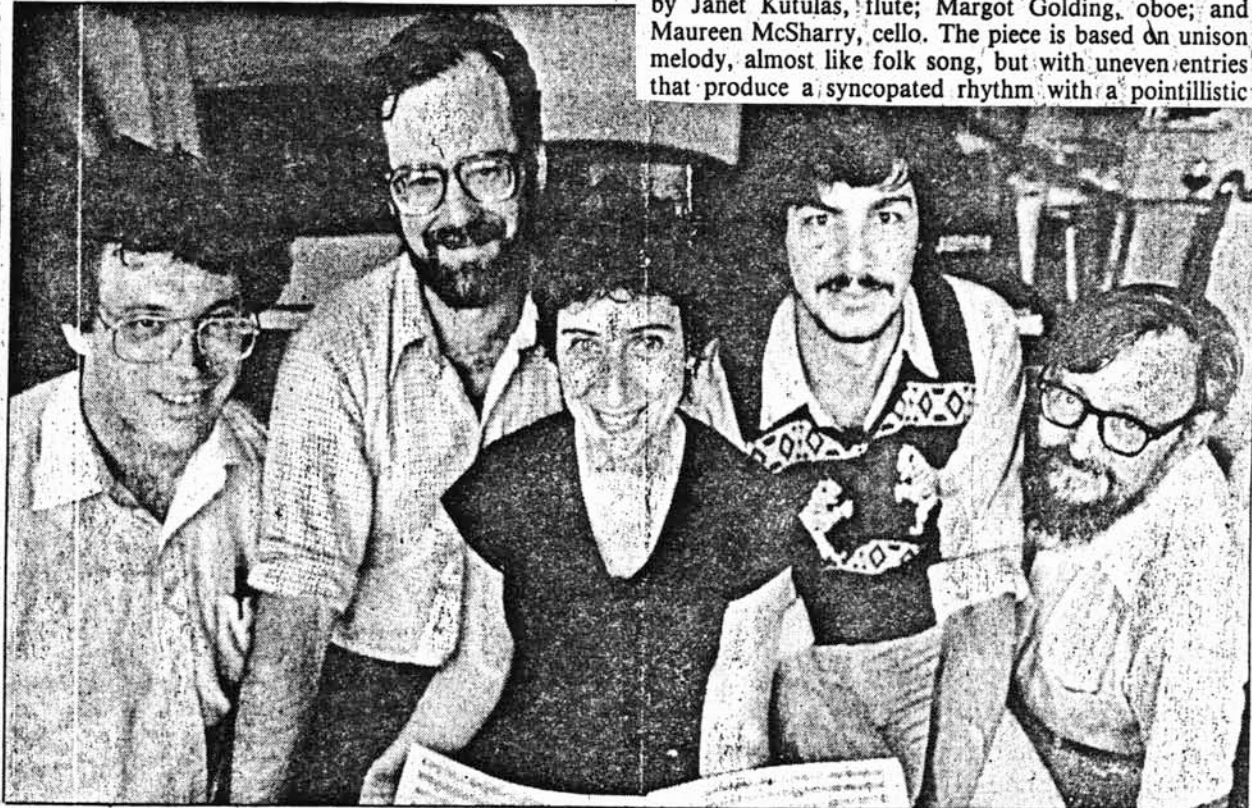
Earplay is a group of composers and performers who "went public" on Tuesday evening, Oct. 1, at San Francisco's First Unitarian Church with the first in a series of concerts of recently composed chamber works.

The concert presented works by Richard Festinger, David Lang, David Mackstroth, and Eric Moe, three of whom have earned degrees at U.C. Berkeley. All are recognized composers. (Lang, for instance, is currently holder of the Meet-the-Composer Fellowship with the New York Philharmonic.)

The concert was a gem, the pieces were elegant and exquisitely performed. Richard Festinger's "Impromptu" for Clarinet and Piano was performed by Peter Josheff, clarinet, and Karen Rosenak, piano. From its lyrical opening through an exuberant contrapuntal exchange, the use of similar motivic materials in each instrument kept the listener riveted to the dialog. Moods alternated swiftly and smoothly, captivating the attention with beauty of design and superb craftsmanship all the way to the expressive final note of the clarinet.

The premiere of David Lang's "Frag" was performed by Janet Kutulas, flute; Margot Golding, oboe; and Maureen McSharry, cello. The piece is based on a unison melody, almost like folk song, but with uneven entries that produce a syncopated rhythm with a pointillistic

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Earplay Board of Directors and participants (l-r) Richard Festinger, Eric Moe, Tamar Diesendruck, Peter Josheff and John Swackhamer (Board members not shown, Caroline Colburn and Janet Kutulas)

feeling. At first the cello is plucked, and its matching to the oboe produces a distinct color of sound that contrasts with that of the flute. An incredibly moving moment occurs when the cellist applies bow, and the flute, having broken away completely, chirps from the side.

David Mackstroth's "Music for Clarinet, Viola and Piano" dates from 1980 and was performed by Peter Josheff, clarinet, with George Thomson on viola and Eric Moe at the piano. The piano techniques were similar to some in Festinger's work with broken clusters producing a scintillating sound, as though the crystal drops of a chandelier were sounding like wind chimes. Motivic material repeated made the way clear while landscaping it with pulsing song and building intensity.

Eric Moe composed his "Variations for Violincello and Piano" especially for Bay Area Cellist, Laszlo Vargo who, with Karen Rosenak at the piano, gave the work a brilliant premiere. The eight movements explored a

multitude of cello techniques that required, and received, a master's hand to execute. These were always expressed in perfect partnership with the piano, producing a series of ravishing sounds, just one of which was double stops with one of the strings playing harmonics while the other sounds in its deepest register. The variety of moods built to a Finale that included splendid drumming in the piano and strongly bowed cello passages that brought the piece, and the concert, to a triumphant close.

Earplay seems an appropriate name for this group whose concert left the ears remarkably refreshed and the mind convinced that these artists possess a sure cure for shyness of contemporary music.

Earplay's next concert will receive two performances: November 3 at the Tresidder Oak Lounge, Stanford University, and November 4 in San Francisco's First Unitarian Church, both at 8 pm. For information on these and upcoming concerts, phone 759-8351.