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Ensemble Allows Easy Access to Avant-Garde Composers

MUSIC REVIEWS

In the second concert devoted to new American music at the CSU Summer Arts Festival, the New York New Music Ensemble again demonstrated the variety in the current avant-garde.

Along with music by three young composers enrolled in the festival's workshop program, the New York ensemble—conducted efficiently by Harvey Sollberger Tuesday in the Gerald R. Daniel Recital Hall in Long Beach—offered work by program director Richard Festinger and composer-in-residence Chen Yi.

Festinger's "Serenade for Six" proved festive, coalescing fluttering, silvery streamers with multicolored fog and dancing, rhythmic juice. The whole was complicated yet decorative and merry, a musical garland.

Chinese American Chen Yi, a much performed and lauded composer of late, was represented by her 1988 sextet "Near Distance." In

11 minutes, it reveals a decided dramatic flair. Its ebb and flow leave plenty of space for haunting, ruminative music and special effects: A violin slides softly up high; the pianist brushes the inside of his instrument; the musicians literally hiss.

Joel Lindheimer's "Triplexity" played sleek metrical games with violin, marimba and bass clarinet. Smart accents and shifting gears gave it a jazzed-up, Stravinsky-ish feel. Philip Curtis sought disjunct intervals, rhythms, sonorities and phrases in his "Two Perfunctory Pieces" for cello and piano, with predictably acerbic results. Beth Wiemann's "Hornpipe Dreams" featured a violinist protagonist, apparently displaced from the slow movement of a 19th century sonata, wandering through an echoey, nostalgic electronic soundscape, briefly reminiscing on the hornpipe from Handel's "Water Music" along the way.

Throughout, the New Yorkers' unselfish ease allowed a listener to focus squarely on the music itself.

—TIMOTHY MANGAN