

HYPERLINK "<http://www.calendarlive.com/printedition/calendar/cl-et-mec21feb21,0,1635118.story>"<http://www.calendarlive.com/printedition/calendar/cl-et-mec21feb21,0,1635118.story>

MUSIC REVIEW

Composers take a running leap at the future

The Monday Evening Concerts showcase the optimistic work of six young composers.

By Mark Swed
Times Staff Writer

February 21, 2007

The composers selected for the first of the new generation of Monday Evening Concerts were born between 1959 and 1979. They are from, or live in, North America. They have been recognized by academia, major grant-giving organizations and important ensembles and performers as five young men and one woman of promise.

So it was perhaps inevitable Monday that a spirit of optimism ran through their works, all written within the last decade, even when the composers may not have intended it. Optimism, in fact, is running high at MEC during this transitional season. Gone from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, shopping for a new venue and

temporarily housed at the Colburn School's Zipper Concert Hall, the series this year has three guest curators. Monday's was Steven Stucky (later programs go to Kent Nagano and Esa-Pekka Salonen). Audiences at a special benefit earlier in the season and Monday at Zipper have been healthy-sized, indicating that there is life after LACMA.

Stucky, a composer associated with the Los Angeles Philharmonic for the last decade, is also a professor at Cornell University and a talent scout. The six composers he championed are what you might call youngish company types. None came from what was once known as the downtown school — the feisty anti-establishmentarians, Minimalists, pop- and world-music mavens, microtonalists and otherwise angry, inventive radicals of one stripe or another. No flags were waved or sensibilities outraged Monday.

Still, all the composers had something to say and the compositional chops to say it. And the evening also had a whiff of exoticism.

Ana Lara, from Mexico City, took her inspiration for "Darkness Visible" from William Styron's "Memoir of Madness." Her sounds for eight players were dark, low, rumbling. A primeval character might be identified, especially with percussion and growling bass clarinet; a brightness and freshness spoke of depression transcended.

Canadian Brian Current demonstrated an interest in unsteady speed for "Faster Still," written for solo violin, string quartet and piano. He actually came closer to insanity than Lara but in the happiest of ways. The solo violin writing, spectacularly played by Movses Pogossian, is sort of Paganini on LSD. The virtuosic arpeggios go haywire, while a string quartet contributes continual disorienting harmonic and rhythmic shifts as if playing scales and chords on an airplane in turbulence. Fun is to be had if you have a strong stomach and really good players.

MEC had really good players Monday. The ensemble was Xtet and, with the new addition of Pogossian, I've never heard it sound stronger. Donald Crockett conducted expertly.

The evening's other amusing piece was Andrew Norman's "Gran Turismo" for eight violins and played by Colburn students. "Higher! Louder! Faster!" is how Norman writes of his score's "emphatic trajectory." Futurism and video-game car-racing are this composer's passions. The eight violinists chase after one another like NASCAR drivers, swooping ahead and falling behind. The Colburn School is no hotbed of modern music, but these student violinists were in the swing, and the piece was short enough (eight minutes) to be enjoyed as a fast ride to nowhere.

More substance and complexity, if less originality of voice, came from James Matheson's "Falling," Sean Shepherd's "Lumens" and Philippe Bodin's "Peal." "Falling" is theme and variation without theme, relying on charismatic string trio textures. "Peal," a quintet, operated with canons that were too obscure on first hearing but that created intricate, grainy, interesting sounds. "Lumens," a sextet, was more conventionally lyrical but unpredictable.

mark.swed@latimes.com

If you want other stories on this topic, search the Archives at [HYPERLINK "http://www.latimes.com/archives"](http://www.latimes.com/archives) [latimes.com/archives](http://www.latimes.com/archives).

[HYPERLINK "http://www.calendarlive.com/copyright"](http://www.calendarlive.com/copyright) [Article licensing and reprint options](#)