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ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Artists Show Their Mettle in Eerie 'Mostly Metallophones'

Music Review

By DON HECKMAN
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Ever wonder what a metallophone was? Probably not. But vibes players know, and so do the gamelan artists (and listeners) of Indonesia. Metallophones are tuned metal objects (bars, bowls, tubes, gongs, etc.), struck with sticks or mallets—a xylophone, for example.

The "Mostly Metallophones" concert at Pomona College's Ly-

man Hall on Friday night offered an intriguing view of the sounds and timbres that can be produced by various-sized metallophone ensembles.

One of the events in the MicroFest 2002 Festival of Microtonal Music: Global Tunings, the program was primarily performed by members of the Harvey Mudd American Gamelan.

Most of the music was composed by Bill Alves, an associate professor of music at Harvey Mudd College.

For the uninitiated ear, the

sounds were mellow and repetitive, often trance-like in their power to engage the listener. From a more technical point of view, the pieces also offered easy access to microtonal intervals not present in Western music.

In the evening's more compelling moments, the shifting, plaintive tones were reminiscent of the far too rarely heard works of the neglected American composer Harry Partch. That connection was especially apparent during a duet composition written by composer Kraig Grady for two vibraphones

tuned to microtonal intervals—32 to the octave—similar to those employed by Partch. The overtone effect of the clashing, interacting, closely tuned vibraphone sounds was eerie, driving some audience members to cover their ears. But it was a convincing display of the potential tools for creative and emotional impact that lie within the microtonal metallophonic musical universe.

MicroFest 2002 continues weekends through May 25. Information: www.microfest.org.