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# Calendar

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

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## Microfest Sets a Different but Pleasing Tone

### Music Review

By JOSEF WOODARD  
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Microtonal music, created in the margins between the 12 notes of the standard Western tunings, tends to occupy a parallel universe. Devotees crusade for the cause while others express perplexity or disregard for this defiantly "out of tune" music, which requires newly invented instruments or retrofitted and retuned traditional ones. Of course, intonation is much more relative than musical culture leads us to believe.

Hammering home that idea in Los Angeles is Microfest, organized by guitarist and broadcaster John Schneider. The key event of this year's event unfolded Sunday at Pierce College, where Schneider teaches. This persuasive program was fortified with "classics" by the likes of Harry Partch, Lou Harrison and Ben Johnston, whose work alone was powerful enough to make converts.

An early highlight of the program was the Los Angeles unveiling of Harrison's Sonata for Harpsichord, written for Linda Burman-Hall, who premiered it last New Year's Eve and played it Sunday. She gave the work its due cerebral gusto, savoring both the added overtone stew and the fragility of the retuning.

For his part, Schneider played "adapted guitars," including one fitted with a bizarre constellation of miniature frets. Supporting the notion that microtonal composers lean toward philosophizing, Schneider also indulged in *singspiel*, on Johnston's "The Tavern"—a world premiere—with text by Rumi, and on Partch's salty-

witted, alien folk tune "Letter From Hobo Pablo," from 1943.

On friendly, folkish turf, the group Just Strings offered up Garry Eister's harmlessly pretty "Song & Dance" and marimbists Erin Barnes and Eli Shapiro bobbed to the amicable eighth-note pulse of William Slye's "Dancing With the Dragon." Viklarbo, the notable chamber group, intoned the surprisingly touching wiles of Johnston's Trio, and clarinetist Amanda Walker coaxed "betweenner" notes from Johnston's solo piece "Ponder Nothing."

Stealing the show, though, was New York pianist Philip Bush. The attack and mechanistic schemes of Harrison's engaging "Cinna," for "tack piano," is reminiscent of Nancarrow's great player piano Studies, but Bush is very much a live human interpreter. Bush also laid out the joyous, tweaked sound of "just intonation grand piano" on Johnston's "Suite for Microtonal Piano," its "Blues" movement graced with extra blue notes, and its "Etude" a swirling, clangorous gush of piano sound, just outside normal.

• *Microfest: A Festival of Microtonal Music continues Friday, 8 p.m., Neighborhood Church, 301 N. Orange Grove Blvd., Pasadena, \$10 (213) 623-6845; and Sunday, 7 p.m., Brand Library, 1601 Mountain St., Glendale, \$10, (323) 258-3260.*

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