



THE LIBERTY

PERFORMANCE

MICROFEST
at Pierce College, March 8

I'll probably never fully understand the mechanics of microtonal music — "equal temperaments" and "just intonation" involve math, you know — but in a nutshell it seems to involve cramming a much wider palette of pitches into an octave than we're used to in Western music. It implies, therefore, the aesthetic acceptance of a whole lot of flat-flats that, even to some of the openest ears, might sound too flat. Time will tell. The major avant-garde micro gods — Harry Partch, Lou Harrison, Ivor Darreg and Erv Wilson — are all native Californians, some of whose pioneering work goes back to the '30s.

At this jam-packed evening of micro groups and soloists, the stage was loaded with a charming display of delectably strange-looking custom-built acoustic instruments: altered-fretboard guitars, a sparsely stringed harp, huge vibes, a hammer dulcimer, and an imposing set of free-standing marimba columns of different heights. It was perfectly fitting that everything in the room, including the audience's tweeds, was the color of wood.

Guitarist John Schneider and harpist Susan Allen started the program with works by Lou Harrison, two short pieces of quiet, baroque-style lyricism and melancholy; lovely Schaeider's trio Just Strings then gave us the West Coast premiere of a Partch favorite from 1943, the amazing and evocative *Letter From Hobo Pablo*, a jarring avant-primitivist work of fragmented rhythms, comic hobo poetry and cat-killing dissonances played on Partch's truly odd flabby-string-sound guitars. Guitar just-intonator Rod Poole marched out to applause, sat down cross-legged and improvised a stretch of intricate arpeggio patterns in his trademark style, slow and exploratory at first, picking up speed and a complexity of harmonies and colors that evoked a bird in flight, shifting angles with its wings. Composer Kraig Grady, wearing a wacky animal-like fetish head — no doubt related to the Polynesian mythos of his *Music From the Island of Anaphoria* (on Tiny Organ Records) — filled every inch of the room with the resonating deep tones of his hand-crafted, just-intoned vibes.

Later, dessert: all players joined together for a glorious micro version of Terry Riley's legendary *In C*; it was much better than the record. Though I was the only one nodding my head in ecstasy all

the way through, there must have been others equally blissed out.



Niiiiiiiiice
(Tony Mostrom)



DONNELL ALEXANDER