

CULTURE MONSTER; Partch on a painterly note; The ensemble's LACMA concert vividly ties musical, artistic visionaries.

Woodard, Josef

ABSTRACT

On Tuesday, the group presented an enticing grab bag of Partch pieces, including text-fitted works sung-spoken by group founder John Schneider, rhythmically juiced-up and accessibly exotic instrumental pieces ("Castor & Pollux," "Sonata Dementia") and the L.A. premiere of the juicy "Dance Pantomime" from Partch's 1951 opera, "King Oedipus," with the special, re-created Partch instruments joined by musical old-schoolers, contrabass, clarinet and wordless vocalists Argenta Walther and Fahad Siadat.

FULL TEXT

For many years, Los Angeles County Museum of Art was a go-to spot and a regular haunt for contemporary music in the Southland. A major change in programming policy sent this circus packing, seeking out other, mostly downtown venues. But there remain faint glimmers of the old new music glory in the Museum's Bing Theatre, via LACMA's occasional concerts ostensibly linked to its art exhibitions.

The "Art & Music" series on Tuesday offered a match-up of composer-inventor Harry Partch and the presumably doppelganger retrospective show "John Baldessari: Pure Beauty," which recently opened in the Broad Contemporary Art Museum. Doing the musical honors was the committed, veteran L.A. group Partch Ensemble, featuring a world premiere of a commissioned work by former Partch ally Victoria Bond. Her intriguing "There Isn't Time" is loosely based on a Baldessari text-image piece, available for audio-visual cross-referencing down the way.

However sympathetic the connection between dryly witty Conceptual art avatar Baldessari and self-made American maverick Partch, who died in 1974, there are at least superficial points of comparison. Both are mostly Southern Californians and are examples of iconoclastic individualism, dodging artistic norms and creating new languages, art-making mechanisms (in Partch's case, new instruments and his famed 43-tone scale) and new, self-designed artistic approaches. Both artists also include healthy doses of humor (Baldessari more than Partch).

Partch, the ensemble, bears roots dating back to 1991 and has become a strong and ongoing concern in the microtonalist world, most notably in Los Angeles. On Tuesday, the group presented an enticing grab bag of Partch pieces, including text-fitted works sung-spoken by group founder John Schneider, rhythmically juiced-up and accessibly exotic instrumental pieces ("Castor & Pollux," "Sonata Dementia") and the L.A. premiere of the juicy "Dance Pantomime" from Partch's 1951 opera, "King Oedipus," with the special, re-created Partch instruments joined by musical old-schoolers, contrabass, clarinet and wordless vocalists Argenta Walther and Fahad Siadat.

Yet the concert's centerpiece, interestingly, was the only work not composed by Partch. Bond's four-movement work deftly showcases the visually dazzling instruments and pays respect to Partch's vision while showcasing fresher musical elements of style and idiom, which have come to pass since Partch's death, outside of his determinedly

hermetic outlook as an artist.

In that broadening way, Bond underscores a critical difference between Partch and Baldessari: If Baldessari's Conceptualism was hugely influential on the art world, Partch remained more insular and esoteric in his world and his work. But it needn't remain thus.

--

calendar@latimes.com