

Dramatic 'Tyrant' catches the edge of madness

By Michael Cameron
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In the monodrama, "The Tyrant," composer Paul Dresher and librettist Jim Lewis create a nameless deranged despot haunted by paranoid delusions. Drawing from the stories of Italo Calvino, Lewis' tale sticks to the well-mined stock images vividly etched in public consciousness by potentates real and imagined.

In a Friday local premiere performance at the Museum of Contemporary Art, John Duykers' vocal lines and the Chicago Chamber Musicians interacted seamlessly throughout the monologue most notably when a martial snare drum morphed into jazz-rock conflagrations, much to the king's irritation. Duykers inhabited the loony liege with well-timed facial tics and crisp diction, boasting an eerie floating falsetto and booming low chest notes.

It's a gripping 70 minutes of drama, fueled by the composer's mechanized, pulse-driven score, tightly integrated with a rambling text. The chamber drama is slowly making its way across the nation, and the MCA audience was happy to welcome it.