



MUSIC REVIEW

Composers show off innovative edge

The sonic explorations of Morton Subotnick and Paul Dresher shine through in EAR Unit performance.

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The musicians of the California EAR Unit have a long history, but they continue to push onward. So do the two composers who filled their bill Monday night at LACMA's Bing Theater, Morton Subotnick and Paul Dresher. Each has produced a rich legacy of work and doesn't look to be through yet...

Dresher, meanwhile, continues to explore the idiom of the monodrama in a nearly hourlong piece with the provocative title "The Tyrant" (2005). Here, Dresher and librettist Jim Lewis have a solo vocalist — the estimable, darkening tenor of Jonathan Mack — speak and sing to a king whose paranoia about his security makes him afraid to physically leave his throne (Stalin comes to mind).

One is reminded of Dresher's monodrama of two decades past, "Slow Fire," but his musical resources are now more sophisticated. Intricately orchestrated, with one fascinating sequence for clockwork percussion patterns, the score ranges comfortably from lyrical compassion to dissonant backgrounds and an outbreak of free jazz. Some of the words were difficult to make out, but Dresher's dramatic instincts and the contemporary implications of the text were more than enough to keep listeners focused.

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