

Tuesday, May 17, 2005

Last Night in LA.: Dresher and Subotnick

The [California E.A.R. Unit](#) concluded its Monday Evening Concert Series season at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art last night with two powerful and emotional works--one of which is definitely destined for bigger things.

Composer [Paul Dresher](#), in collaboration with writer Jim Lewis and tenor John Duykers (Nixon in China), has created a significant new music theater work entitled *The Tyrant*, inspired by Italo Calvino's short story *A King Listens*. The collaborators took Calvino's concept of a king who was unable to leave his throne because of fear of being overthrown, a king forced to experience his kingdom entirely through sound: what he could hear, what he imagined from what he heard, what he imagined he heard. The libretto is a new text built on this premise. The work was not created as a performance piece, but some time, somewhere, a Peter Sellars talent will certainly want to stage it.

Dresher has presented many styles and voices in his music. The language of this new work is conservative; in some respects I thought of Bartok's *Bluebeard* in the colors and the effects which Dresher evokes as the king's moods shift from imperious control to yearning, to fear, to paranoia, to longing for love (of a young woman he had heard singing through his window), to despair, to resignation. The instrumental ensemble (pierrot-plus-percussion) was exceedingly well-performed by the California EAR Unit six. Dresher's web site says that *The Tyrant* will become a regular repertory item on the touring list of the [Paul Dresher Ensemble](#).

The Tyrant received its premiere in Seattle on May 1, and last night was only the second performance of this significant new work. Jonathan Mack was splendid as soloist. Dresher was there for the performance before leaving for Philadelphia where *The Tyrant* will be performed at the Prince Music Theatre tomorrow and Friday and Saturday nights with Peter Maxwell Davies' *Eight Songs for a Mad King*.

posted by Jerry Zinser [12:33 PM Comment \(0\)](#)