"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition
New York: Today, increasing clouds, more humid. High 85. Tonight, scattered showers. Low 70. Tomorrow, decreasing clouds. High 80. Yesterday, high 86, low 69. Details, page B7.

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MUSIC REVIEW

A Marriage of Percussion and Program

By ALLAN KOZINN

A percussion concert can turn into droning monotony, despite the variety of instruments played, if the program is not carefully considered. The percussionists of the Forum Music Group, a Taiwanese new music ensemble, clearly took that into account in planning their Sunday afternoon concert at the Taipei Theater. The works they offered ranged from the gentle textures of marimba, vibraphone and crotales in Toru Takemitsu's "Rain Tree," to Georges Aperghis's theatrical and sometimes comic "Le Quetteurs de Sons" to a collection of more riotous and timbrally wide-ranging works by composers working in distinct styles.

One of the more compelling of these was Chen May-Tchi's "Beyond the Festival," a piece in which the metallic ripple of Chinsese cymbals is combined with an array of Western noisemakers. Scored for six percussionists — the entire Forum ensemble — the piece is based on a traditional Chinese New Year's tune, which Ms. Chen transforms into a metrically complex structure with an aggressive edge that gives it both drama and drive.

Similarly virtuosic and even more extroverted, was Pan Hwang-long's "Totem and Taboo." The score's relationship to the work by Freud from which it takes its title was never quite clear, but Mr. Pan's writing was energetic and his palette was broad enough to accommodate everything from bird calls and a lion's roar to the most delicate of chimes.

Chin Shi-wen's "Wandering Stars," for percussion quartet, explored the variety of surface textures available to a percussion group, focusing on skins, wood and metal in turn. Mr. Aperghis's work, a trio, described the journey from infancy to death in an idiosyncratic way that involved stylized acting and vocalization, as well as periods of silence and tight ensemble interplay.

Minoru Miki's "Marimba Spiritual," composed as a requiem for those who died during the African famine of the mid-1980's, showed that percussion music, properly marshaled, can be as emotionally searing as writing for strings. A hauntingly graceful marimba line, which was played eloquently by Wang Ying-chih, lies at the heart of the work, surrounded by increasingly fast and powerful writing for a trio with a varied arsenal at hand.

The young musicians in the Forum Music Group threw themselves into the performances with energy and precision. Besides Ms. Wang, the ensemble includes Hsu Bor-nien, Cheng Chi-hung, Wang Hsiao-yin, Ko Ying-chu and Lu Chia-ching.

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