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the **transbay**  
Creative Music Calendar  
March 2004

# Vorticella:

## free-swimming



Vorticellian Brenda Hutchinson and the Long Tube

Interview by djll

**Vorticella is an improvised music quartet composed of Kryz Bobrowski, French horn and kelp; Erin Espeland, cello; Brenda Hutchinson, Long Tube; and Karen Stackpole, percussion and gongs. On January 18, Vorticella played what seemed like its first show in years in the Bay Area, at the Jazz House in Berkeley. It was a good night, with the group showing a virtuosic level of interplay, a free-ranging imagination, and a gently subversive sense of humor.**

*Transbay:* You sound like you rehearse a lot. Not in the sense of tightly arranged, but in the ease and precision with which you all seem to relate to and learn from each other, even as the music is progressing, it sounds that there's been a lot of work put into figuring out how to play with each other, and how to keep the focus moving forward—so that the music keeps changing but also is remaining cohesive due to a common group identity, which seems to be based on listening.

**Kryz:** Over the years we have played a lot—a lot more privately than publicly—but it feels like playing more than rehearsing. While playing out is something we would definitely like to do more, I am grateful to be involved with a group of people who like to play together just for the sake of playing together—for those shared, momentary, musical “ah-ha’s.”

The cohesiveness of sound is something that seems to happen without effort within this group. A comment we often get from listeners is “I couldn’t tell who was doing what.” More than

once, Brenda, Karen, or Erin has asked me how I made a particular sound and I’m not even sure I was the one who made it, never mind how.

**Brenda:** When we rehearse we usually start off with a “free” improv—sort of just checking in with each other. It’s kind of like greeting old friends as they come to the door for a dinner or some little gathering. I am usually so relieved after we finish the first improv—like, *whew*—it’s so good to be together and fresh and easy to breathe. It’s like that everytime we rehearse that first piece. Sort of like when you meditate and you first sit down and realize how good it feels to enter that space—very grateful, too.

Then we rehearse, as in, *work*—the way we do this is to play exercises we have developed over the years and that we continue to come up with. The exercises are really these very loosely defined sets of parameters for relating to one another, like “follow the leader,” and we are very careful about not saying or defining in any way what that means—as in, how do you determine who’s the leader—we deliberately leave that up to each other’s own unstated sets of criteria. It works for us because we like to see what happens and are quite happy to deal with whatever comes along. When I first started to play with Kryz and Erin, I was very nervous. Each time we finished playing something, I would anticipate a discussion about what we did “wrong” or some comment about something I played that didn’t “fit”. And it never happened. Eventually, I relaxed about it and have never thought that way about it again—playing with Vorticella is really my first experience improvising with other people and I can’t believe how fortunate I’ve been.

Also, the Long Tube

*continued on page 2*

is a perfect instrument for improvising and the way I play it is a good match for how we relate to one another. Basically with the Tube—intention is an expendable commodity—sometimes it's a good way to set something in motion, but the response from singing any particular thing into the Long Tube is usually unpredictable so the practice is not so much about mastery of repeatable things as it is about developing flexibility and an ease with the unknown. Also trust. Trust and ease are pretty basic to our ensemble. And it's not just trust but a kind of enjoyment and delight in anticipation of what anyone will do at any given time. At this point when we are playing, it's like a conversation.

**Karen:** I agree with Brenda that much of what we do comes from the trust, mutual respect, and ease we have around each other, just as people, and as creative musicians. We have a lot of fun with our music, following loose guidelines devised to challenge and stimulate new directions while mixing liberally with enough free playing to revel in the feeling of the moment. Our creative process is built upon listening, intuitive awareness, exploration, expression, and the joy of sound and music. We work well together because we share a common aesthetic, enjoy our conversations, and are unassuming parts of a whole. Overall, a very fecund situation that I feel privileged and honored to be a part of.

**Brenda:** The strategies we have developed for relating to one another have refined a kind of musical communication that is conducted with deep respect and consideration for what each of us is contributing to any given moment. It's also like driving a really fast car. I am hyper-alert to very small units of time and nuance of sound. It happens so fast! I love it.

**Erin:** We have developed a few improvisational structures, usually with only one or two very simple rules, but they serve to shake up the sound a little. We have a "duets" structure where two people start playing, and when a third person starts, one of the two playing drops out. Rinse and repeat. It's not necessarily in any order, so requires you to listen and interpret constantly—is someone joining and who are they joining to play with? We have another structure called "follow the leader." While playing, each player has to decide who the leader is and follow her. And of course the leader can change throughout the improvisation. There are no visual cues, no requirements for agreement. And notice there's no rule that someone "be the leader!"

**Brenda:** We don't define 'duets,' and we're not rigid about overlaps and momentary trios and quartets. 'Duets' are pretty easy to keep your place in. 'Follow the leader' is a little harder. Each of us has her own ideas about what LEADER means, and it probably changes depending on the particular situation. We don't



Erin Espeland and Krys Bobrowski

define what FOLLOW means, either. Support? Imitate? Complement? — etc. Sometimes we come up with strategies and then we can't remember them the next time. We also have 'cards' with abstract pictures or short phrases on them that are open to interpretation.

**Krys:** The program of our sessions that Brenda describes has developed quite naturally over time. And while the intensity changes when there are ears out there, we pretty much follow the same program. The only few things missing between the private and public sessions are the friendly banter and laughter between 'pieces' and a lot of tea.

When you play with the same folks for a long time you have the luxury to create an extensive common vocabulary. The flip side of this is you can easily fall into ruts; when Brenda does that thing, I do this thing. But if you play with different people all the time you are constantly inundated with new sonic situations. And in a way, playing with different people is a strategy in itself. I agree with Erin, that the strategies shake things up a bit; they keep us out of the ruts.

*Transbay:* Krys, you mentioned that your history with Erin goes back about fifteen years. How long have you all been playing together? How many performances have you done? Any especially memorable ones? Were there any great moments which helped define (for you) what Vorticella was all about?

**Krys:** Vorticella has had a few incarnations. The first included Brenda Hutchinson, percussionist Eva Baumgartner and myself. Our first gig was at the Hotel Utah in January 1997 when Gino Robair was running shows there. Soon after, Erin Espeland joined us along with David Kwan, electronics. This quintet did a number of performances

together around town: Kommotion—where Bob Boster had a series, Opus 415—The Lab and New Langton Arts. A highlight for this version of Vorticella was a small tour we did in Germany in the summer of 1998. We played a concert in Stuttgart at the Akademie Schloss Solitude where I had a year-long artist's residency, and at the Musik Raum in Berlin. In 1999 Eva moved south to San Diego and David Kwan moved on to other projects. I had heard Karen perform in Dean Santomieri's "The Boy Beneath the Sea." She joined a session one afternoon and has been with us ever since. Since then we've played a few times at Tuva/the Jazz House and recently at the Meridian gallery. One project included working with dancer/choreographer Vangie King in her performance "Fire in the House." We hope to do more interdisciplinary collaborations in the future.

**Erin:** Krys and I have been playing a long time—since 1989 when we met as members of the Mills College Contemporary Music Performance Ensemble. I was one of the few undergraduates in the ensemble and was totally intimidated. I was new to the type of music and totally new to improvisation. The group was playing Zorn's *Cobra*, and I found it incredibly difficult. Krys and I improvised together on our own, which got me more comfortable with off-the-cuff play. French horn and cello have a similar range and tonality, and I think that affected how we as people played with each other. Our instruments made it easy to build a single sound together.

I'm attracted to playing with people who are interested in working together through listening and playing in order to engineer a sound together. I feel like a lot of what Vorticella does is build sounds, shift them, and build them again. I like that a lot of the time you can't tell who is contributing what element of the sounds.

I haven't really played classical or any sort of traditionally-tonal music for over 10 years, and my life with the cello has focused on sounds more than melodies because of that. Vorticella is the only group I play with right now, and I'm very aware of each player's vocabulary of sound—although it's always expanding! Vorticella in its current configuration has been together for 5 years. Often I know which of my sounds will contribute to the texture going on, because it is a familiar texture in at least some aspects. Also, having a knowledge about what will sound good makes me freer about experimenting with new sounds—knowing that if I fail, I'm not out on a limb, I can just go to the familiar.

**Krys:** You asked about defining moments... I distinctly remember a post-concert moment in Berlin. There was a question and answer period after the show and someone in the audience asked about one of our strategies, 'cards'. We have short phrases, single words or pictures on cards that we blindly choose right before we start to improvise. This person was confused because "it didn't sound different." In retrospect, I wonder if he was expecting the dramatic changes one gets in a Zorn piece when a card comes down. It made me realize that our strategies are internal, not external, practices; that it is not important conceptually to the listener to know what strategy is behind the music they are hearing. Each strategy is just a way to shift our personal sonic perspective.

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**Jiffy Scuttler 3 @ The Rx Gallery (132 Eddy St. @ Mason, SF)**  
**8PM, \$6, 21+, March 26th** <http://jiffy-scuttler.praemedia.com>  
**Marcos Fernandes & Robert Montoya (Trummerflora - SD)**  
**Damon Holzborn (Trummerflora - SD)**  
**Tim Perkis & Wobbly (from right here)**

*Transbay:* Tell us about the name Vorticella. My intuitive hit is that it has to do with forces of nature.

**Karen:** Vorticella...well, you can take that in a number of directions... Scientifically speaking, the vorticella is a protozoan...a single-cell organism that uses cilia to move around and feed itself. Physically, it sports an inverted, cilia-adorned bell perched upon a stalk containing a contractile fibril called a myoneme. When stimulated, the myoneme shortens, causing the stalk to coil like a spring. Vorticella usually anchor themselves to small particles of material; however, it is not uncommon to see them free-swimming. When they undergo fission, they split longitudinally in a process called budding. Once split, one vorticella keeps the original myoneme and the other swims off to grow its own. They hang out in little "communities."

It's a perfect name for our group. Musically speaking, Kryz, Brenda, Erin and I are the analogous representation of (a) Vorticella. Each member comprises, alternately and simultaneously, functions of the single cell. For instance, there exists the inverted bell—the very shape of it suggests the main body and receiving portion of the organism...listening. Then there is the stalk with the myoneme—a perfect representation of reaching out, mobility, and sudden action in response to stimulus. The cilia—the small filaments that sweep food into the gullet of the receiving organism—are representative of the methods used to integrate ideas from the environment and the individuals in the group for the nurturance of the creative whole, be it our instruments, guidelines, or approaches. And lastly, there are the vacuoles, those ever changing envelopes that contain the food for digestion and nutrition for the cell. These can be likened to storage of ideas in the minds and hearts of the individual components of the organism, and the digestion likened to the process of converting that raw material into creative energy.

As for the action of vorticella, the protozoan—budding, keeping a myoneme, growing a new one, free-swimming or anchoring to material—with a little imagination, you can see how such behavior forms a distinct parallel to how Vorticella, the group, go about relating to each other musically and how we create the music we share (as Brenda and Erin so eloquently stated)—individual expressions within a group to create a single sound: a complex, yet simple organism.

*Transbay:* It's an established principle of modern physics that chains of very simple interactions can lead to very complex systems. Karen—Brava! for that deeply scientific-poetic description of musical group interaction. And thank you all for sharing your thoughts and ideas with us. We hope to see Vorticella free-swimming again soon.



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## CD Release Party for Tiner - Phillips - Schoenbeck Trio *plus* Wind Trio of Alphaville

8 pm Thursday, March 25 @ The Jazz House Tickets - \$8 - \$15 sliding scale  
3192 Adeline Street, Berkeley (@MLK - across from Ashby BART)

8 pm - Wind Trio of Alphaville  
Philip Gelb - shakuhachi  
Phillip Greenlief - woodwinds  
Jon Raskin - saxophones

9 pm - Tiner - Phillips - Schoenbeck Trio  
Kris Tiner - trumpet  
Noah Phillips - guitar  
Sara Schoenbeck - bassoon

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All Ages

### MARCH EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC CALENDAR

Friday, March 5th Artists' Reception for "Untitled Soundscape #449B" by Norman Long + works by Sarah Filley 7-10pm, free

Monday, March 15th Oluyemi Thomas/Spirit duo + Damon Smith/  
Jason Mears duo w/dancer Miyuki Kobayashi 8pm, \$6-10

Friday, March 19th Found Object Night 8:30pm, \$6-10  
Lesser, Karen Stackpole, Jon Brumit, Die Elektrishen, Cheryl Leonard

Monday, March 22nd Eddie Gale Jam Session 7-10pm, \$5 donation

Tuesday, March 23rd Charming Hostess + Good for Cows 8pm, \$6-10

Saturday, March 27th Active Music for Tired Ears 8pm, \$6  
Bizzart, Create(!), Half-handed Cloud, Pepito, Matt Davignon/LX Rudis

Sunday, March 28th "Blind Cinema" synaesthetic sounds of Alex  
Mendizabal 8pm, \$5-10

21 Grand Arts Group Inc. is a 501(c)3 non-profit and a proud supporter  
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## sfSoundSeries



Helmut Lachenmann's music challenges our received notions of culture via stunning reconceptions of traditional forms, materials, and instruments. This program showcases some of his most powerful chamber music: Allegro Sostenuto (for trio), Salut fur Caudwell (guitar duo), and Pression (cello solo).

Friday March 19 2004 8 pm admission \$10 / \$5 students  
Community Music Center 544 Capp Street SF (between 20th & 21st in the Mission)  
[www.sfsound.org/series.html](http://www.sfsound.org/series.html) [series@sfsound.org](mailto:series@sfsound.org)

**ACME Observatory** A Series of Contemporary Music  
 @theJazzHouse 3192 Adeline-Berkeley  
 1 Block from Ashby BART Station  
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 acme@sfiscund.org  
 510.649.8744  
 Free Admission  
 donations for the artists accepted

Saturday March 13 8:15pm

**Viv Corringham**  
 from London



With  
 Tim Perkis, Scott Looney  
 Toyoji Tomita & Gino Robair

Saturday March 27 8:15pm

**Toshi Makihara**



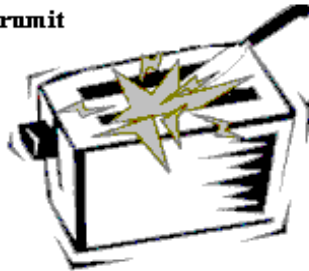
With  
 Steve Adams • Jon Raskin  
 George Cremaschi  
 John Shiurba • Tom Djll

and  
**Wade Matthews**  
 and friends



Found Objects Night

Lesser Fri. Mar 19  
 Karen Stackpole 8:30 pm  
 Die Elektrikshen \$6-10  
 Cheryl Leonard/Tim Blue  
 Jon Brumit



At 21 Grand Gallery - 449B 23rd St.  
 Oakland

Please bring objects from home for the artists  
 to create music with. (Artists are only allowed  
 to bring manipulation & amplification tools.)

**21 Grand  
 449B 23 St  
 Oakland**  
 (bet Bway & Telegraph)

Mon Mar 15 \$6-10

**8PM**

Oleyumi Thomas.....bcl  
 Spirit.....perc

**9PM**

Miyuki Kobayashi.dance  
 Jason Mears.....sax, cl  
 Damon Smith.....cb



New venue!  
 Campbell Recital Hall  
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Sebastian Berweck  
 Monday, March 8th, 8 pm

A piano recital surveying  
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*Luggage Store  
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Thursday, Mar 4 2004 8:00 PM

Dina Emerson voice w/Matt Davignon  
 processing  
 Rick Walker's Loop-pool

Thursday, Mar 11 2004 8:00 PM

Forward Energy Trio: Jim Ryan  
 sax/flute, Kristjan Bondesson  
 contrebass,  
 Andrew Wilshusen drums

The Left Coast Improv Group:  
 ErnestoDiaz-Infante acoustic guitar,  
 Ron Heglin trombone, Jeff Hobbs  
 cornet/clarinet/sax/violin,  
 Scott R. Looney electronics,  
 Bob Marsh cello/voice,  
 Jim Ryan flute/amped kilimba

Thursday, Mar 18 2004 8:00 PM

Outsound.org presents rebellious  
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 musicians tba

Thursday, Mar 25 2004 8:00 PM

mundane media & (not)quiet presents  
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# March Concert Listings

PLEASE GO TO [WWW.TRANSBAYCALENDAR.ORG](http://WWW.TRANSBAYCALENDAR.ORG) FOR DETAILS ABOUT THESE EVENTS, PLUS UPDATES AND SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

**Mon 3/1 7:30 PM FREE Mills College Ensemble Room**  
[5000 MacArthur Blvd. Oakland]

Guitarist and Partch-specialist John Schneider performs rarely heard works by Harry Partch. Featured pieces include BITTER MUSIC, 6 POEMS BY LI PO, and BARSTOW played on original or exact copies of Partch's instruments.

**Mon 3/1 8:00 PM Zebulon's Lounge**  
[21 Fourth Street Petaluma]

John Schott's Typical Orchestra with Ches Smith, drums and Devin Hoff, bass; featuring Ben Goldberg, clarinet.

**Tue 3/2 8:00 PM \$12-15 Intersection for the Arts**

[446 Valencia, between 15th and 16th Mission District SF]  
United Brassworkers Front - Fronted by composer and trumpeter Darren Johnston, the music of the United Brassworkers Front roots itself firmly in jazz while forging bold new directions.

**Wed 3/3 8:00 PM \$5 The Jazz House**  
[3192 Adeline @ MLK Berkeley]

All musicians are encouraged to come to this monthly I.C.E. series where themes are used as catalysts for improvisations.

**Thu 3/4 7:00 PM \$18-\$35 Yerba Buena**  
[Third and Howard SF]

Other Minds Festival: Tigran Mansurian, Jon Raskin and the Rova Saxophone Quartet, Hanna Kulenty

**Thu 3/4 8:00 PM \$6-10 Luggage Store Gallery**  
[1007 Market St. @ 6th Street SF]

8pm: Dina Emerson (voice) with Matt Davignon  
9pm: Rick Walker's Loop-pool

**Fri 3/5 7:00 PM \$18-\$35 Yerba Buena**  
[Third and Howard SF]

Other Minds Festival

**Sat 3/6 11:00 AM FREE Meridian Gallery**  
[545 Sutter Street SF (nr Powell BART and MUNI)]

A Workshop/Recreation Day with the Cornelius Cardew Choir - free and open to all interested parties 11am - 5 pm

**Sat 3/6 7:00 PM \$18-35 Yerba Buena**  
[Third and Howard SF]

Other Minds Festival: Joan Jeanrenaud, Alex Blake, Francis Dhomont, Stanley Shaff

**Sun 3/7 9:00 PM \$8 Bottom of the Hill**  
[1233 17th Street (17th @ Missouri) SF]

Deerhoof; Why? (from the anticon crew); Moore Brothers

**Mon 3/8 7:30 PM FREE Mills College Ensemble Room**  
[5000 MacArthur Blvd. Oakland]

CCM Composer-in-Residence Tom Djill presents an evening of solo works developed with Mills grad student composers which grow out of personal investigations into the properties of acoustic instruments.

**Mon 3/8 8:00 PM FREE strictly Ballroom**  
[Cambell Recital Hall, 541 Lasuen Mall, Stanford Univ.]

Sebastian Berweck, piano: works by Schöllhorn, Seidel, Wenk

**Thu 3/11 8:00 PM \$6 Luggage Store Gallery**  
[1007 Market St. @ 6th Street SF]

Forward Energy Trio; The Left Coast Improv Group

**Thu 3/11 8:00 PM \$10-15 Venue 9**  
[252 9th Street (bet. Folsom and Howard) SF]

Dance Elixir presents a new dance/music/video performance series (March 11-13), featuring the work of electronic music composer Christopher Keyes, percussionist Christopher Froh, and extended voice/physical theater artist Rasmus Jørgensen.

**Sat 3/13 8:15 PM FREE(donations) ACME Observatory**  
[The Jazz House, 3192 Adeline Berkeley]

Viv Corringham with Scott Looney, Tim Perkis, Gino Robair, and Toyoji Tomita.

**Mon 3/15 8:00 PM \$6-10 21 Grand**  
[449B 23rd St. Near 19th Street BART Oakland]

Oluyemi Thomas, bass clarinet with Spirit, percussion; Miyuki Kobayashi, dance, Jason Mears, saxophone & clarinet, Damon Smith, double bass

**Fri 3/19 8:00 PM \$10 sfSoundSeries**  
[Community Music Center, 544 Capp Street, SF]

sfSoundSeries: Helmut Lachenmann - *Allegro Sostenuto* and *Salut für Caudwell*

**Fri 3/19 8:00 PM \$20 Paramount Theater**  
[21st & Broadway, Oakland]

Oakland East Bay Symphony: Anthony De Ritis with DJ Spooky

**Fri 3/19 8:30 PM \$6-10 21 Grand**  
[449B 23rd St. Near 19th Street BART Oakland]

Found Objects Night: Objects submitted by audience are used to make music. With Lesser, Karen Stackpole, Die Elektrischen, Jon Brumit & Cheryl Leonard

**Sat 3/20 8:00 PM \$10-15 Unitarian Universalist Church**  
[505 East Charleston Road, Palo Alto]

An evening of inventions and improvisations by the James Armstrong Quartet

**Thu 3/25 8:00 PM The Jazz House**  
[3192 Adeline @ MLK Berkeley]

CD Release Party for Tiner-Schoenbeck-Phillips Trio; The Wind Trio of Alphaville

**Thu 3/25 9:30 PM \$8 Bottom of the Hill**  
[1233 17th Street (17th @ Missouri) SF]

Erase Errata

**Fri 3/26 12:00 AM \$15(\$13 adv) Noe Valley Ministry**  
[1021 Sanchez San Francisco, CA ]

Joan Jeanrenaud - cello, samplers // Miya Masaoka - koto, electric koto // Larry Ochs - saxophones and compositions. Only Bay Area show in 04!

**Fri 3/26 8PM \$8 - \$15 The Jazz House [3192 Adeline Berk]**

Harris Eisentstadt's Ahimsa Orchestra (20-piece) featuring Steve Adams, Phillip Greenlief, Liz Albee, Sara Schoenbeck, Kris Tiner, Noah Phillips, Bill Horvitz, and many other great musicians from LA and the SF Bay Area.

**Fri 3/26 8:00 PM \$6 Rx Gallery**  
[132 Eddy (near Mason) SF]

Jiffy Scuttler 3 presents Marcos Fernandes & Robert Montoya, Damon Holzborn as well as the fine duo of Tim Perkis and Wobbly

**Fri 3/26 10:00 PM FREE Connecticut Yankee**  
[100 Connecticut St San Francisco, CA 94107]

Sam Flot Quintet - pycodelic—or even psychedelic—complex jazz original tunes with mind bending words!

**Sat 3/27 8:00 PM \$6 21 Grand**  
[449B 23rd St. Near 19th Street BART Oakland]

Bizzart, Create(!), Half-Handed Cloud, Pepito, Matt Davignon

**Sat 3/27 8:15 PM FREE(donations) ACME Observatory**  
[The Jazz House, 3192 Adeline Berkeley]

Toshi Makihara with Steve Adams, Jon Raskin, George Cremaschi, John Shiurba & Tom Djill; Wade Matthews and friends

**Sun 3/28 4:00 PM \$15 Old First Concerts**  
[1751 Sacramento, SF]

David Holzman, piano: Bloch, Davidovsky, Feinsmith, Kahn, Schoenberg, Susman, and Wolpe



**March 2004**

**1510 8th Street, Oakland, CA 94607**

<http://transbaycalendar.org>  
[youwillsubmit@transbaycalendar.org](mailto:youwillsubmit@transbaycalendar.org)

The **Transbay Creative Music Calendar** is a volunteer-produced free monthly journal for non-commercial creative new music in the San Francisco Bay Area. In addition to our comprehensive listing of upcoming events, we publish articles and reviews about local music and the people who create it. We talk about a wide range of modern music, including: experimental, improvised, noise, electronic, free-jazz, outrock, 21st century compositions, and sonic art. Each month, 1000 copies of the Transbay are mailed to individuals and hand-delivered to over 45 performance venues and public locations throughout the Bay Area. Contact us for a FREE subscription!

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**2455 Telegraph Avenue, Berkeley  
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Submission deadline for the April 2004 issue is

**!!!!!! March 15 !!!!!!**

Calendar Listings must be submitted using the online form at [transbaycalendar.org/submit.html](http://transbaycalendar.org/submit.html)

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