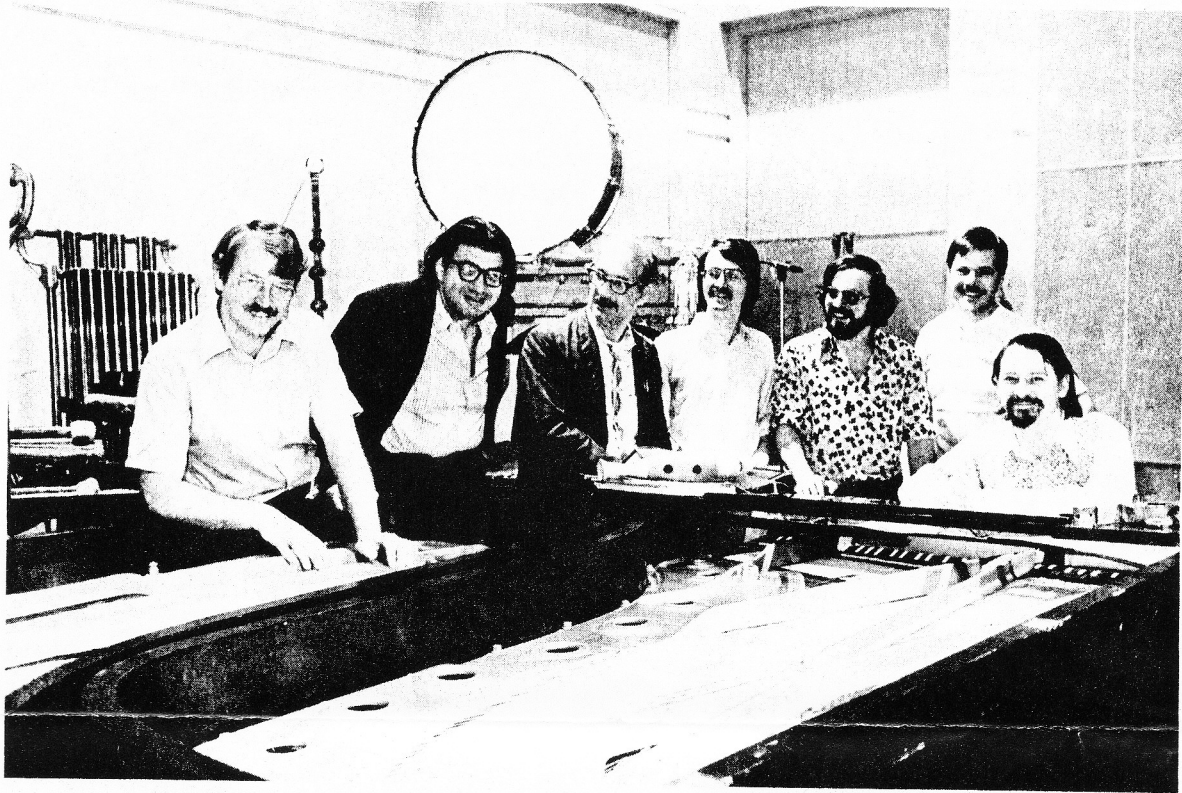


Musical America
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From: Joe Cherniack

JUNE IN BUFFALO



Preparing *Makrokosmos III*: Jan Williams (director of the center), Morton Feldman, George Crumb, pianist John Newell, percussionists John Boulder and Lynn Harbeld, pianist Yvar Mikhashoff

Second annual contemporary festival features Xanakis, Crumb

IT WAS THE perfect ending," bubbled Morton Feldman, "almost as though the piece had been commissioned as *Music to Close a Festival With*." The usually less demonstrative Mr. Feldman was referring to the final movement of George Crumb's *Makrokosmos III* for two amplified pianos and percussion, whose mystical, processional crescendo slowly wound down through a walking pentatonic figure, disappearing into a timeless eternity. It concluded the second annual "June in Buffalo" contemporary music festival, which had earlier presented *Mr. Trotter is a music critic of the Buffalo Evening News*.

Crumb's *Makrokosmos I* and *II*, plus *Madrigals, Books I-IV*.

The festivals are sponsored by the State University of New York at Buffalo and its Center of the Creative and Performing Arts and are directed by Feldman, operating from his position as Edgard Varèse Professor. The 1976 version of "June in Buffalo" ran from June 1-13, included twelve concerts, thirty-three performers, attracted students from all over the country, and was noteworthy on a number of counts, beginning with the residence for successive weeks of such guest luminaries as Iannis Xenakis, Steve Reich, and Crumb, plus host faculty members Feldman and Leja-

ren Hiller. Maximum student and public interaction with these prominent composers was provided through lectures, seminars, and personal overseeing of musical preparation at open rehearsals, all in a decidedly shirtsleeve atmosphere.

A broad scope

The musical content of the festival was also exceptional. Exhibiting an aura of comfortable, confident maturity, the planners avoided the pitfalls of extremism, neither dogmatically heeling to a single musical party line nor spreading themselves too thin in an attempt to cover the whole con-

temporary spectrum, but remaining quite at ease within a relatively restricted range of modernity. But what really set the festival apart and gave it breadth was that it didn't succumb to that slavish, missionary pursuit of "now" which admits not so much as a glance at its own antecedents.

And so "June in Buffalo" devoted one evening to violinist Paul Zukofsky and pianist Gilbert Kalish in absolutely daunting performances of all four Ives Violin Sonatas. Another whole concert was turned over to music by Satic, including the drama *Sociate* in its voice-piano version, with rising young soprano Martha Hanneman exhibiting remarkable support, timbral vitality, and control over the long line and narrowly varying dynamic curve. And as a complete intermezzo (maybe even scherzo) in the festival context, there was a recital of turn-of-the-century songs by Beach, Cadman, McDowell, and Chadwick, plus barroom favorites like *Bird In A Gilded Cage*. They were sung with airy and artful grace by soprano Winifred Simpson, lithe and lovely in her pompadour and puffy period gown, her appropriate whimsy stopping short of burlesque.

Contemporary repertoire

The main business, of course, was the chosen contemporary repertoire, introduced with a blend of classic and modern Greek influences. The marble walls and graceful Ionic columns of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery sculpture court formed a hospitable acoustical and visual backdrop for Xenakis' thundering *Persephassa* for six percussionists and his *Eonta* for brass and clangorously resounding piano, both conducted by Jan Williams, director of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts. The locus of the remaining eleven concerts was the more intimate Baird Recital Hall on the University campus. Here Xenakis' new work for solo percussionist, *Psappha*, was given its American premiere by Donald Knaack. It revealed an immense underlying primitive appeal in rhythmic regularity and more subtle interest in the gradual shift of leading surface timbres from drums to metallophones. *Psappha* so towered over the rest of that program it was like changing on a Rembrandt while casually thumbing through the Police Ga-

zette.

A significant new departure was revealed in the music of Steve Reich, whose stock in trade up to now has been in focusing the aural magnifying glass on the fascinating effects created when identical strict rhythms are slowly pulled out of phase. The festival presented three such Reich works, but also his latest opus, *Music for 13 Musicians*, disappointingly heard via a tape of its April premiere rather than live but encouragingly showing the broadening of horizons. Phased rhythms were still present, but embellished by pedal lines and other harmonic and melodic elements, adding a decidedly new, vertical feeling to Reich's world.

Resident composers Feldman and Hiller were adequately but not dominantly represented. There was the premier of Feldman's *Instruments II*, but his preoccupation with music as a quiescent wash of tints, timbres, and textures was more beautifully projected by *Instruments I* for winds, celeste, and percussion, lightly glossed.

Hiller's landmark *Illiad Suite* for string quartet of 1957, the first computer-realized composition, was a highlight of a fine program by the Kronos Quartet, which also included Feldman's *Structures*, Xenakis' *ST/4*, and was marred only by a runaway gain control in Crumb's *Black Angels* for amplified quartet.

Two towering performances were by pianists Joseph Kubera and Yvar Mikhashoff in the Boulez Second and Third Sonatas, while only the indisposition of Steven Radecke prevented completion of all three Boulez sonatas, another programming coup. But with no slight to the other composers, there was no doubt that Xenakis and Crumb were the dominant figures in this festival.

Xenakis and Crumb

Xenakis' stochastic, often computer-assisted compositional techniques give his music, at its best, a grand and massive sonic architecture, not in the least surprising in view of the composer's twelve-year association with Le Corbusier. It gives Xenakis a sort of heroic, welkin-striding image among contemporaries. Crumb's music, on the other hand, inhabits the world of allusion, distant space, and occult reference, of exquis-

ite gesture rather than dynamic thrust. I can't think of any living composer who has a better ear for sheer beauty of sound. His music invariably leaves the listener feeling that he has not simply observed but actually participated in a magical ritual. But for all this cosmic quality there is a simultaneous sense of a miniature that creeps in, a feeling of containment and mystery somewhat analogous to that created in three-dimensional form by the fanciful, glass-encased collages of Joseph Cornell. This suggests that Crumb's art may be too circumscribed, and beginning to repeat itself, whereas Xenakis' energy and outward-turned philosophy stand a better chance of going on from here to significant new ground.

The festival made a strong case for both Xenakis and Crumb, boldly sketching their strengths and differences. And while it demonstrated that they have virtually nothing in common on the surface, it was equally apparent that they share a basic and unteachable quality of eloquent communicativeness, the very rare ability to write music that reaches out and seizes the ear of the listener.

"June in Buffalo" was successful because it had several unique points of view to put forward and because it had a receptive environment waiting to hear them. As a contemporary music center, Buffalo has a tradition going back some fifteen years to the advent of Lukas Foss as Buffalo Philharmonic music director and a founder of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts.

Over the intervening years both orchestra and university have continued to attract top flight musicians anxious to play in such hospitable surroundings, and the city's contemporary musical product has been exported to Europe many times over. As a result, Buffalo's reputation may be stronger in Darmstadt, Cologne, and Warsaw than in New York or Los Angeles.

Last year director Morton Feldman kicked off the first "June in Buffalo" festival by getting John Cage as his big name. This year Xenakis and Crumb. And now he talks enthusiastically about equally big fish he's angling for in 1977. Obviously, when Feldman claims that "June in Buffalo" will soon rival big international festivals, he means business. Δ