

June in Buffalo Festival opens

Buffalo News 6/4/96 P.D-8

By HERMAN TROTTER

News Music Critic

The University at Buffalo's June in Buffalo Festival actually began on Friday with the start of a four-day workshop directed by Cort Lippe and focusing on "real-time interactive computer music."

Sunday's concert featured two works for solo flute, two for solo voice, and one each for percussion ensemble and solo piano.

One of my fondest memories is of soprano Martha Elliott. No amount of electronic processing could disguise the clarity of articulation or warm, superbly centered quality of this very beautiful voice. She sang the premiere of "Mantis" by Michael Rees to a text that was neither provided nor identified, but seemed to contain satirical, whimsical observations on contemporary life.

She was joined by narrator Barry Moon in Tepring Crocker's "Evening Ebb," a very atmospheric piece perhaps more successful in melding voice and electronics, but losing something in projecting the beauty of the voice along the way. Again, the text was not identified. Although substantial parts could be clearly heard in its narrative about oceans, night herons, sun-

REVIEW

June in Buffalo Festival

Concert No. 1, live instruments and interacting-computers/tape.

Sunday evening in Drama Theater, UB Center for the Arts.

sets, cloudfalls and whispering air, many other parts were lost in the swelling electronics, and the narrator's final phrase "for another audience" suggested either an incomplete story or some kind of joke.

The program opened with the premiere of "Gemini" by Carlton Wilkinson, a brief work for three percussionists conducted from a synthesizer keyboard by Erik Ona. It employed marimbas, xylophone and drums in painting a shimmering sonic canvas with electronically sliding pitches in waxing and waning energy levels.

The longest work was the premiere of "Virelai" by Emil Harnas played by pianist Stephen Manes. Springing from widely spaced, isolated piano tones, the music was punctuated by slashing electronic bursts and bent tones coming from speakers surrounding the audience. Gradually increasing complexity of the piano part, including two long,

dramatic descents from the top to the bottom of the keyboard, didn't divert a kind of fey otherworldliness in the overall character of the music, which peaked in a loud electronic-dominant climax. This is a work that gains considerably in interest as it progresses.

Oddly, even though the electronically processed sounds throughout the concert produced textures, tones and colors that seemed to want a new vocabulary to describe them, the palette of sound thus created is not nearly so wide or varied as that found in the conventional orchestra.

Flutist Elizabeth McNutt played Andrew May's "The Twittering Machine," apparently after the like-named Klee painting. The initial popped flute attack was fractured and expanded electronically, going on to create, in both realms, a lot of sounds quite appropriate to the title, sometimes in dialogue between flute and electronics, elsewhere in extravagant electronic extrapolations climaxing in loud gushing sounds.

The concert concluded with flutist Rachel Rudich's performance of workshop director Cort Lippe's "Music for Flute and ISPW."

ENTERTAINMENT

Erb's writing adds punch
to harp literature

By HERMAN TROTTER

News Music Critic

Tuesday's June in Buffalo concert threw its best pitch first, Donald Erb's 1995 Sonata for Solo Harp played by Yolanda Kondonassis.

The first movement, "Round and Round the Wind," opened with ominous low-register ruminations, then mirrored the flavor of its title with quirkily arpeggiated phrases, a climax with the strings pummeled by the palms of the hands, and a mad swirl to a dying low ostinato figure.

The slow movement, "Song for Sarah Gooder," refers to an 8-year-old English girl who testified in 1842 against child labor abuses. The slow, deliberately sculpted lines, with the performer humming a kind of harmonic underpinning, created a touchingly probing, inquisitive linear development, with softly dissonant chords and a few single tones at the poignant close.

The concluding "Dirty Rotten Scherzo" began with a slashing chordal attack and featured repeated special effects with some sort of plectrum used to urge tremulous glissandos out of the harp, the conclusion arriving on wings of cascading swirls and a violently upswept convulsion.

The performance was stunning. The harp literature needs this sonata, and the sonata needs a recording ... soon!

Diderik Wagenaar's 1981 "Stadium" was played by pianists Helena Bugallo and Amy Williams. Clangorous, heralding figures spaced by cool chords established a flourish-then-pause kind of progression, ending on a questioning, suspended phrase, but there was a static quality to the music, which didn't seem to be going anywhere.

Keith Moore's 1995 "From the Diary of an Organaut" seemed cut from similar cloth. Played by organist Suk Kyeung Choi, its staggered, mildly dissonant chords with

REVIEW

June in Buffalo Festival

Tuesday evening, Slee Hall, University at Buffalo North Campus.

brief cantabile and ostinato episodes sounded plodding, without a sense of destination.

Patrick Clark's 1995 "Rhyming Shapes," performed by the ensemble SIRIUS conducted by Harvey Sollberger, was adorned with whimsical movement titles. "Lonely Is the Monk" was dreamlike, questioning phrases giving way unexpectedly to fragmentary ricky-ticky jazz interludes. In "That In-Between Time" an eerie continuum of slowly changing patterns degenerated to every-instrument-for-itself, but stability arrived in the final "Myriad Libidinal Dance Figures." Its tick-tock pulse mutated into a free jazz melee over an unwavering offbeat piano ostinato.

Sollberger returned to conclude the concert, conducting an ensemble of 17 strings, piano and percussion, with Rachel Rudich playing piccolo, flute, alto and bass flutes, in David Felder's complex 1994 "Inner Sky." Thundering bass drum beats introduced a shrill continuum of strings and piccolo, the strings giving no sense of "choir," only individual struggle. When Rudich switched to flute it was almost inaudible, but later elements of all four flutes returned with other signals in a tape track, which both supplemented and substituted for the orchestra, including an intriguing counterpoint of glissando strings and taped sounds in counter motion.

The typical Felder density and high energy were abundantly evident, the tape track frequently providing contrasting spatial relief. Also typical of Felder, the music raised more questions than it answered on first hearing, but left one wanting a return engagement.

Medley of composers taking 'June' fest by the horns, strings and . . . computers

By HERMAN TROTTER
News Music Critic

In times of drastically shrinking public funding of the arts, the University at Buffalo is doggedly hanging onto its two internationally recognized annual new-music festivals.

The North American New Music Festival, with its emphasis on performance, held sway for a week in the middle of April.

And today marks the opening of public concerts in the June in Buffalo Festival, whose main thrust is in fomenting all kinds of stimulating interactions between an invited faculty of veteran composers and some 30 emerging younger composers, many of whom will be hearing their music performed by professional artists and ensembles for the first time.

In fact, this year's festival has expanded a little by adding a workshop that "concentrates on real-time interactive computer music." This workshop began on May 31 and overlaps the rest of the festival, with public performances today and Monday.

There are also daily master classes for registered composers and faculty only, but all the rest of the events are open to the public and virtually all are free.

The traditional final concert next Sunday will be by the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Arie Lipsky and Erik Ona. This is the only concert with an admission charge — \$5 general admission, or \$3 for students and seniors.

Composer David Felder, now in his 11th year as director of the festival, is particularly pleased to have the interactive computer music workshop as part of the festival, feeling that it projects an important new direction in musical art.

As significant new works using this medium he mentioned Cort Lippe's 1994 "Music for Flute and ISPW" (IRCAM Signal Processing Workstation) to be performed in today's concert, and Philippe Manoury's 1986 "Jupiter," to be presented by flutist Rachel Rudich during the 8 p.m. Monday concert, both in the Drama Theater in the Center for the Arts.

One of the significant world premieres singled out by Felder in this year's festival is Roger Reynolds' 1996 "On the Nature of Things," to be played by oboist Jacqueline Leclair and trumpeter Ed Harkins with the SIRIUS Ensemble to conclude the 8 p.m. Friday concert in Slee Hall.

SIRIUS, according to Felder, is one of the finest of the emerging new-music groups. Felder also points out that members of the New York New Music Ensemble, which he considers pretty much the premier group of its kind, will present the festival's penultimate concert.

Among the other top-flight performers in this year's festival will



Composer Donald Erb and bassist Robert Black, right, will be mainstays of the festival.

be the Buffalo-based Amherst Saxophone Quartet, flutist Eberhard Blum, bassist Robert Black and harpist Yolanda Kondonassis, plus such stellar UB faculty performers as pianist Stephen Manes and percussionist Jan Williams.

This year's faculty, in addition to UB-based David Felder and Cort Lippe, will consist of returning "regulars" Donald Erb and Roger Reynolds, plus Philippe Manoury from France, Gerhard Staebler from Germany and Diderik Wagenaar from Holland.

As a final bit of good news, this year, for the first time, June in Buffalo will export its product, presenting a concert in New York City's Goethe House/German Cultural Center on June 13. The expectation is that the Goethe House concert will become an annual event.

The complete schedule of events for the 1996 June in Buffalo festival is as follows:

Today, 8 p.m., UB Drama Theater — Music of Carlton Wilkinson, Michael Rees, Andrew May, Emil Harnas, Tepring Crocker and Cort Lippe for solo instruments or small ensembles interacting with computers and/or tape.

Monday, 10 a.m., 250 Baird Hall — Seminar with composer Philippe Manoury.

Monday, 3 p.m., Baird Hall — Music of Steve Voigt, Eric Zivian, William Heinrichs and Carlos Rivera for ensembles with voice, or solo instruments.

Monday, 8 p.m., UB Drama Theater — Music of Ikue Firitu, Jonathan Golove, Frank Mauceri and Philippe Manoury for solo instruments and/or interacting computers and tape.

Tuesday, 10 a.m., 250 Baird Hall — Seminar with composer Diderik Wagenaar.

Tuesday, 4 p.m., 250 Baird Hall — Seminar, bassist Robert Black.

Tuesday, 8 p.m., Slee Hall — Music of Diderik Wagenaar, Patrick Clark, and Keith Moore for two pianos, ensemble or organ, and featuring the Buffalo premieres of Donald Erb's Sonata for Solo Harp and David Felder's "Inner Sky" for solo flute, strings, piano, percussion and electronics, conducted by Harvey Sollberger.

Wednesday, 9 a.m., 250 Baird

Hall — Seminar with harpist Yolanda Kondonassis.

Wednesday, 10 a.m., 250 Baird Hall — Seminar with composer Roger Reynolds.

Wednesday, 7 p.m., Allen Hall — Regular Opus Classics Live concert, with music of Donald Womack, Jonathan McNair, Philippe Manoury, Carlton Wilkinson, Chris Brown and James Carr for small ensembles.

Thursday, 10 a.m., 250 Baird Hall — Seminar with composer David Felder.

Thursday, 4 p.m., 250 Baird Hall — Seminar with trumpeter Ed Harkins.

Thursday, 8 p.m., Baird Hall — Music of Ching-chu Hu, Amy Williams, Thomas Meadowcraft, Andrew May, Arthur Hernandez and Gerhard Staebler for string quartet, saxophone quartet, double bass or violin-cello duo.

Friday, 10 a.m., 250 Baird Hall — Seminar with composer Donald Erb.

Friday, 4 p.m., 250 Baird Hall — Seminar with flutist Eberhard Blum.

Friday, 8 p.m., Slee Hall — Music of Barry Moon, Gerhard Staebler, Eric Marty, Patrick Clark, Lukas Schulze and Roger Reynolds for ensembles or solo instrument.

Saturday, 2 p.m., Albright-Knox Art Gallery — Works of Toru Takemitsu, Earle Brown, Gerhard Staebler and Morton Feldman for piano or small ensembles.

Saturday, 8 p.m., Slee Hall — Works of Daniel Koontz, Erik Ona, Paul Mathews, Harvey Sollberger, Eliav Brand, Andrew Rindfleisch and Vincent Hammer performed by members of the New York New Music Ensemble.

Next Sunday, 10 a.m., 250 Baird Hall — Seminar with composer Gerhard Staebler.

Next Sunday, noon, 250 Baird Hall — Seminar with Catherine Wickterman, executive director of Meet the Composer Inc.

Next Sunday, 2:30 p.m., Slee Hall — Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Arie Lipsky and Erik Ona in Takemitsu's "Requiem," Diderik Wagenaar's "Lent, vague, indecis" Erb's "Solstice" and Felder's Three Pieces for Orchestra.

★ MAKING IT FRESH

A progression of quality at June in Buffalo

★ By **THOMAS PUTNAM**
News Contributing Reviewer

★ **T**HE JUNE in Buffalo program Wednesday in cozy Allen Hall benefited from the warm acoustics, never mind the warm air. And it was the first piece by Donald Womack, scored for low instruments and percussion, that benefited most.

★ It may not be true that the program was arranged in order of excellence, but it did seem that way. There seemed a steady progress of reliance on dead modern European traditions, though there is nothing to prevent a crafty and inspired composer from making the old sounds and forms sound fresh. *Pace Pound*: Make what once was new, fresh.

★ The festival, of course, has the academic handicap, being a continuing effort to sustain the symbiotic relation of university and composer. What's missing is a living audience.

★ Each piece was roundly applauded (by what appeared largely an audience of June-ees), and the composers were uniformly pleased by the presentation of their pieces.

★ Womack's "Visceral" (1995) for bass clarinet (doubling clarinet), viola, double bass and percussion was wonderfully mellow, and spritely in its metrical incisiveness. Good advantage was made of the color juxtaposition of dark instruments (bass clarinet, viola and double bass) with the sharply defined character of the marimba. There are exotic elements, including a long clarinet passage that closes the piece with a feeling of serenity.

★ The excellent players, conducted quite gently by Erik Ona, were Salvatore Andolina, bass clarinet; Frank Foerster, viola; Robert Black, percussion, and Craig Bitterman, percussion.

★ Clarinetist Patrick O'Keefe and pianist Sandra Brown gave a fine account of Jonathan McNair's oddly named "Huckleberry Finn in the Museum of Art" (1988). Here the piano was tinkered with on the inside, or prepared, so that normal and papery percussive sounds issued from struck keys; and there were other sound extensions as well — key-twiddling by the clarinetist, string-stroking by the pianist. The piece had merits

CONCERT

June in Buffalo

Works by Womack, McNair, Manoury, Wilkinson, Brown, Carr.

Wednesday night in Allen Hall, University at Buffalo South Campus.

ing Huck on the river as I could figure out), impressive piano vehemence (the nastiness of civilization?).

O'Keefe and Brown were joined by violinist Mark Menzies for "Michigan Trio" (1992) by Philippe Manoury, a composer from France. There were attempts to underline sonority — as when the clarinet played into the piano strings, getting however a somewhat weak sympathetic vibration. And there was some attractive melodic agility and rapidity. Apparently the composer was reading Kafka and that writer had some influence here. What, we wonder.

Carlton Wilkinson's "In Love's Absence" (1993), a dry, dry, dry piece in the best post-Web manner (which is to say, the deadliest), was played by Frank Foerster, viola, and Stephen Manes, piano. It was a thinking piece for, well, for absence of love.

REVIEW

Concert

There followed two piano trios. (You will note the preponderance of traditional chamber music formations.) The artists were competent but not dazzling — Karen Bentley, violin, Mary Artmann, cello, and Helena Bugallo, piano.

Chris Brown's "Trio" (1996)

had movement markings that said it all: vigor, determination, sadness. Sadness was far and away the happiest to hear. Elsewhere we had a revival of fingerboard pizzicato and modal-scale modernism.

Last was James Carr's "Hoch-

zirl" (1993), a long exercise in early-century modernism, in which highly expressive anxiety and depression are key elements. There was a dirgelike section that one wanted to like, liking dirges as one does, but even that was dead-

The Buffalo News/Saturday, June 8, 1996

ENTERTAINMENT

Composers get mixed results from experimentation

By LYNNA SEDLAK

News Contributing Critic

With a program of primarily student composers, the concert readiness of the works varied in the seventh concert of the June in Buffalo series, offered Friday evening in Slee Hall on the University at Buffalo Amherst Campus. Some composers seem to be trying out styles with mixed results.

Gerhard Staebler's "Abschiede" was a long work for string trio. It explored Cage-like silences and non-traditional instrumental sounds, everything from barely audible bowing on the bridge to harsh, squeaky sounds of bowing with the wood. It was both atonal and arrhythmic.

Eric Marty's "Eumerions" made occasional use of some of these sounds. They were used for contrast and emphasis amid tritones

REVIEW

JUNE IN BUFFALO
Concert Seven

Friday evening, Slee Hall, University at Buffalo

that opened into melodic passages and arpeggiated figures with engaging rhythmic nuances. It was scored for violin and piano, and the instruments responded to each other without echoing phrases. Karen Bentley and Stephen Manes gave an outstanding performance of this challenging and very promising work.

The program opened with Barry Moon's "Two Songs." Moon is the technical director of June in Buffalo and it showed. Scored for mezzo-soprano (Barbara Cooper) and Sirius, a chamber sized en-

semble, all of the instruments were miked and their sounds amplified, divided and distorted in various combinations. A background of conversational noise was added to the second song. It was all very technical and electronically accomplished, but there was a strong feeling that less would have been a good deal more.

Patrick Clark's "Catgut" for solo electronic violin also had computer support but with better results. At first a fuzzy bass drove the violin melody and eventually settled into a serial beat, somewhat like a minimalist with enthusiasm. Bentley again displayed excellent technique in the demanding piece ranging from swooping glissandi to sustained phrases of soaring beauty. It ended with a quietly percussive, rapid fingering exercise fading to nothing. It has real possibility.

Lukas Schulze's "Without

Words" for string quartet most resembled Staebler. It, too, explored loud/soft juxtapositions and prolonged single notes interrupted by a single plucked note. It, too, was atonal.

The most accomplished composer on the program was faculty member Roger Reynolds. His work "On the Balance of Things" was scored for oboe, trumpet and Serius. Opening with an oboe solo, the independent movement of each instrument soon developed into a melodic section of tranquility. This calm was increasingly interrupted by sudden jarring discords from alternating instruments alone and in combination. At random moments, words and phrases were computer inserted.

Mention should be made of the high quality of the performers for this festival. Much is demanded in a very short period of time, and they deliver.