

REVIEW

Ensemble at June in Buffalo Festival displays young composers' talents

By GARAUD MacTAGGART
News Contributing Reviewer

The June In Buffalo Festival continues to bring some of the finest performers and composers of late 20th-century classical music into area concert halls while exposing new works by young writers to an enthusiastic coterie of like-minded sonic adventurers and voyeurs. Friday night's concert by the New York New Music Ensemble was no exception.

For more than 20 years, the ensemble has been a force for new music on the international scene, commissioning works from both established and neophyte composers at a rate approaching four a year. Then it has taken those pieces and recorded them for small specialist labels like Opus 1, New World and CRI, thus leaving a permanent document of their performances for posterity.

The members of this most recent edition of the ensemble include flutist Jayn Rosenfeld, clarinetist Jean Kopperud, violinist Linda Quan, cellist Christopher Finckel and pianist James Winn. They were joined for Friday's concert by percussionist James Baker, whose battery of vibes, xylophone, glockenspiel, cymbals and tubular bells added pointilistic color to the evening's proceedings, and conductor Harvey Sollberger, a renowned flutist in his own right and co-founder (along with Charles Wuorinen) of the influential Group for Contemporary Music.

From an aural standpoint, the evening featured a mix of world premieres, little-performed works and minor classics of contemporary music. The composers included students and faculty at the University at Buffalo as well as outside faculty brought in especially for the festival. All of the works' composers were on hand to hear their pieces being played and bask in the satisfaction that goes along with strong performances.

Edward Taylor's three-movement "Sextet" was unveiled Friday night as the first piece in the concert and showcased Baker's formi-

dable mallet technique on the xylophone amid the fragmented themes bouncing among the other instruments. Like most of the student works on the program that evening, it showed promise for the composer's future as well as the ragged edge of inexperience.

Fred Gifford's duo for violin and cello "R/Evolve" wasn't among the virginal works (having received prior performances), but it proved to be a rewarding exercise in the stretching of perceived time. The instruments generally played long lines against space, creating cells of sound juxtaposed with cells of silence, commenting on each other's notes with slight flips of their bows. If one believes the old musical saw about slow, tension-filled tunes being harder to play well than quick, facile ones, then this piece was a rough one to get right.

Mikel Kuehn's "Broken Lines" was a quintet piece sans percussion that sounded a bit like some work by Milton Babbitt, which shouldn't be surprising given that he wrote a paper at Indiana University entitled "Aspects of Structure as Compositional Determinants in Milton Babbitt's Phenom-

ena for Soprano and Synthesized Tape." The premiere of the piece was as academic-sounding as the title of the paper.

Jeffrey Stadelman's "Two Movements From Aerial" and David Buddin's "Diversion for Three" were interesting works for sextet and trio, respectively, with Kopperud's clarinet playing on the Buddin piece calling for special notice.

The highlights of the evening came from Charles Wuorinen ("Fortune") and the young Danish composer Bent Sorensen ("The Deserted Churchyard"). Wuorinen has won his share of major awards, including a couple Guggenheims, three Rockefeller Foundation grants and a Pulitzer, while Sorensen just received the Nordic Council Prize in Music for his violin concerto.

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June in Buffalo piano recital offers audience most accessible program yet

By GARAUD MacTAGGART
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The ninth concert in this year's June in Buffalo Festival featured piano works and proved to be one of the most accessible recitals in the series.

True, there were experiments with time, space and timbre from different decades in this century, but there were no tone clusters a la Henry Cowell or slash-and-burn ivory busters of the sort Cecil Taylor whips off at a moment's notice.

The audience for Saturday's show included many of the same composition students and instructors who made up the bulk of listeners for the first batch of concerts. It seemed as if everyone was there to analyze similar problems and solutions like a coterie of higher order math fanatics, dwelling on conundrums of meter and construction.

Meanwhile, the performers and composers were acting as research teams, with the composers offering formulas for the players to realize.

Pianist/composer Daniel N. Seel took over the first half of the concert with performances of works by Stefan Wolpe, a major figure in modern American music, and Wal-

ter Zimmermann, who was present for a marvelous reading of his "Wustenwanderung."

The Wolpe piece, "Waltz (For Merle)," came from 1952, foreshadowing the fragmented themes and start/stop/start performance mannerisms that later became such an ingrained compositional tool for later modernists.

Seel also played his own five-movement "Klavier-Stucke," a work that explored long held single tones separated by silence with a rare stutter-step flurry of notes dropped in for contrast.

The second half of the evening featured pianists Amy Williams and Helena Bugallo. Their initial performance was the world premiere of Erik Ona's "Fragments of 'Jodeln,'" an intriguing piece played on a three-quarter size piano by Williams while Bugallo leaned into the piano's interior, massaging and damping the strings, coaxing harmonics into being.

Williams then slipped into the dual role of composer and pianist for her own "Binary Stars," a work that had Bugallo and Williams playing piano four-hand before Bugallo crossed over to the other piano on stage to finish the piece with dual keyboards.