

Something new sounds very good

By **Garaud MacTaggart**

NEWS CONTRIBUTING REVIEWER

The June in Buffalo Festival is a showcase for a particular brand of classical music, one that takes chances with rhythm, harmony and sonic experimentation, and one that is usually confined to an academic setting. Still, anyone



who wants to hear sounds put together in ways that they've never heard before should avail themselves of the opportunity to attend one of the festival concerts, because if you never hear something new, how can you justify saying you don't like it?

Those attending Tuesday night's JIB concert were patently ready to hear something new, in this case a program showcasing a heavy dose of percussion with a couple shorter pieces featuring other instrumental combinations. Visually, the percussive component of the evening grabbed the audience's sightlines from the get-go. Onstage and at the sides and back of the hall were six batteries of gongs, timbales, bongos, snare drums, timpani, maracas and various other things to hit and shake.

Also on the stage were four drum kits, one piano and a pair of music stands embracing a wide, spread-out score. The piano and the music stands were the only hint that something other than percussion might get a shot.

The evening began with David Felder's "November Sky," a piece for flute (played by Barry Crawford) and computer-processed sounds that blended moments of austere

beauty with an electronic sound space redolent of cinematic science fiction opuses. At one point, close to the end, it was as if the mothership was landing. Another Felder piece, a brass quintet called “Canzone XXXI,” kicked off the second half with thematic material that hinted at the baroque form, but in a brashly acerbic fashion.

Steven Stucky’s “Album Leaves” for solo piano (performed by Steven Beck) was a 21st-century look at what a 19th-century composer might have written. It was quirky, while being the most accessible piece of the evening.

Julia Wolfe’s “Dark Full Ride” was created for a percussion quartet playing on four drum kits. She is known for pinching a few emotional ties from rock ’n’ roll, and this was perhaps the most flagrant example. It was like a long, three-movement drum solo in quadruple.

If the evening had anything approaching “classic” status, it was Iannis Xenakis’ “Persephassa,” written in 1969. This is the piece that justified the massive batteries of instruments surrounding the audience.

When I saw some of the six percussionists insert sound-dampening plugs into their ears, it became apparent that things would get loud.

They did. And it was kind of cool, hearing all of those tones and rhythms blasting at you from all sides, but after nearly half an hour, ringing ears were a side effect.

Concert Review

The Slee Sinfonietta & the UB Percussion Ensemble, part of the June in Buffalo Festival, Lippes Concert hall, University at Buffalo North Campus, Tuesday.