

Mix of New and Newer for an Eclectic Festival

June in Buffalo at the University at Buffalo

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BUFFALO — [June in Buffalo](#) has a bifurcated mission that makes it an odd duck among new-music festivals. Founded in 1975 by the composer Morton Feldman and held annually on the campus of the [University at Buffalo](#), it is partly a celebration of recent works performed by expert ensembles, both local and imported, and partly an intensive weeklong boot camp for budding young composers: 25 of them, from around the world, winnowed this year from nearly 100 applicants.

The composer [David Felder](#) runs the program, as he has for the last 27 years, and this year he shares the teaching tasks with guest faculty members that include [Robert Beaser](#), [Fred Lerdahl](#) and [Steven Stucky](#). (Louis Andriessen withdrew because of a scheduling conflict, while Julia Wolfe, who was to have been on the faculty, was sidelined by the flu.)

Since the festival opened last Monday, the student composers attended various lectures, workshops and master classes, hearing some of the visiting ensembles, including Signal, the New York New Music Ensemble and Ensemble Interface, perform their works. All these events were open to the public, and most were free. Even the concerts requiring tickets — eclectic programs of established composers — had a top price of \$12.

Hearing the students' works can be magical when their ideas are fresh. Some pieces are at a stage where you can still parse their influences, even as they find their own voices. Others are already onto something distinctive, and you wonder where they might go from here. Because of a flight delay and misadventures stemming from a wayward GPS unit, I missed the beginning of an [Ensemble Interface](#) program devoted to six of these scores on Thursday, but I heard enough to be convinced that the young composers are working at a high level.

The most immediately striking of these youthful pieces was Onur Yildirim's shimmering, delightfully unruly "Mus-I zaman" ("The Mouse of Time," 2012). Scored for strings,



June in Buffalo Jean Kopperud performs on a tube instrument she and David Felder built for the piece "Blews." Photo by Irene Haupt.

woodwinds, harp, percussion and piano, the piece is remarkably concise: not short, exactly, but with plenty of motion, none of it wasted. The ensemble and its conductor, Scott Voyles, seemed energized by the piece and played it with the wildness and color it demands.

Nissim Schaul's Trio for violin, cello and percussion (2010) made its points less noisily but nearly as powerfully. You could hear a hint of Feldman here. Mr. Schaul's sounds are spare and whispered, with a dissonant but compelling edge that keeps you fascinated.

Nathan Kelly's "Harbor Music" (2012) for flute and harp was disarmingly innocent. Its harp writing is tactile, its flute lines rich in melody. Mr. Kelly provides enough athleticism and dialogue to make this an appealing showpiece. And in "Drawing" (2012) Jonghee Kang elicits a dynamically fluid, pointillistic texture that hints at narrative while remaining alluringly aloof.

A few hours after the student program the [New York New Music Ensemble](#) played a program devoted mostly to faculty composers. The guitarist [Eliot Fisk](#), though not a member of the ensemble, opened its concert with a warm-toned, sweetly lyrical reading of Mr. Beaser's "Shenandoah" (1995), a set of variations on the folk song. Mr. Beaser's "Variations" (1982), an involved three-movement showpiece for flute complete with an overview of the instrument's techniques, traditional and contemporary, was performed with a thoughtful brand of virtuosity by Jayn Rosenfeld, the flutist, and Stephen Gosling, the pianist.

Mr. Felder was represented by three movements from "Rare Air" (2009), a work that explores various aspects of the clarinet or, more properly, the agility of the group's extraordinary clarinetist, Jean Kopperud. In "Blews" Ms. Kopperud performed on a tube instrument that she and Mr. Felder built for the score. It looks like a boa constrictor; it's hard to say how it sounds, since the score is heavily layered with electronic timbres and evokes a forest full of banshees. The other movements, "Boxmundottir" and "Boxmunsson," are more conventional, if only by comparison. In both, Mr. Kopperud played a bass clarinet energetically and sometimes with a jazzy tinge, but always enmeshed in Mr. Felder's evocative electronic scoring.

Mr. Stucky's "Ad Parnassum" (1998) and Mr. Lerdahl's "Time After Time" (2000) are colorful, high-energy essays that offer an attractive glimpse of each composer's work, if not necessarily the current state of his art. The New York New Music Ensemble, conducted by James Baker, closed its program with Jacob Druckman's animated "Come Round" (1992).

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