

City & Region

Eclectic Performance Institute is a fine fit for June

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NEWS CONTRIBUTING REVIEWER

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This year marks a first for June in Buffalo. The UB-based contemporary classical music festival introduced its inaugural Performance Institute, designed to further develop the interpretation of contemporary music through seminars, master classes, and the resulting concert, which was given in the intimate Baird Recital Hall on UB's North Campus on Friday night.

The program began in captivating fashion with "Spiral No. 1" for cello, percussion and piano by Cambodian American composer Chinary Ung. The initial theme, a folk-like pentatonic melody played by the cello, quickly transformed into an ever-shifting sea of melodies and ambient colors propelled by unpredictable rhythmic swells.

Each player in the trio was well equipped to interpret Ung's wide-ranging and expressive palette. Cellist T.J. Borden possessed a brilliant and innate lyricism, his every phrase a rich and evocative testament to the composer's beautiful yet idiosyncratic melodies. Nicholas Emmanuel's understated and assuring presence at the piano provided both the rhythmic and harmonic bedrock of the texturally dense "Spiral." Percussionist Ross Aftel deftly covered everything from marimbas and crotales to assorted gongs and toms.

Influential Austrian composer Anton Webern was featured in both halves of the expertly paced concert. The inclusion of such works as "Bagatelles (Op. 9)" perfectly demonstrated the historical precedent for the abstract melodies and inventive structures that were so prominent on the rest of the program, and indeed, throughout the June in Buffalo festival. The JACK Quartet, with Borden sitting in on cello, interpreted the "Bagatelles" with all their intrinsic intensity.

Guest soloist Irvine Arditti delivered an inspired performance of "Intermedio alla Ciaccona" by one of June in Buffalo's senior faculty composers, Brian Ferneyhough. A seemingly uninterrupted fury of violin slashes, the work is characterized by extreme jumps in intervals, which required Arditti to be extremely lithe in the left hand while quickly adjusting his touch in the right hand. "Intermedio" is a virtuosic composition for violin that plays like a Cubist vision of the quintessential showstopping Romantic concerto. Though abstract and fragmented, all the elements were there--the robust tone, the razor-sharp articulations, and exuberant melodic phrasings.

"Fifty-Fifty" for two pianos, by fellow faculty composer Charles Wuorinen, was a fitting end to the evening and a wonderful showpiece for musicians Jade Conlee and Michiko Saiki.

The 2013 June in Buffalo festival heads into its final stretch today with a free chamber music concert at 4 p.m. and a ticketed 7 p.m. event featuring Ensemble Signal. The festival wraps up on Sunday with a 2:30 p.m. performance by the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of JoAnn Falletta.