

# Buffalo's Slee Sinfonietta champions neglected repertoire

## Preview

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By Andrew Druckenbrod, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Pop and rock groups have had the choke hold on bizarre and absurd names for decades: from the Lovin' Spoonful to Toad the Wet Sprocket to Death Cab for Cutie. It's not much of an issue in classical music -- pronouncing names of performers and composers is hard enough.

So while at first blush it might appear that the Slee Sinfonietta, performing Friday at University of Pittsburgh's Bellefield Hall, is a hip indie group or perhaps a contemporary of the Electric Light Orchestra, there's no such intrigue. It has a less sexy origin: a name.

"Frederic Slee was a Buffalo-area lawyer and patron, a person who had studied composition and musicianship with [Nadia] Boulanger," says David Felder, a composer on the faculty of SUNY Buffalo and director of its Center for 21st-Century Music. "The Slee bequest provides resources for a string quartet series, chamber music and the teaching of what now seems to be named Music Theory."

### **Slee Sinfonietta**

**When:** 8 p.m. Friday

**Where:** Bellefield Hall,  
Oakland.

**Tickets:** \$10-\$20 (free  
for Pitt students);  
[www.proartstickets.org](http://www.proartstickets.org)  
or 412-394-3353.



David Felder will bring his Slee Sinfonietta to town this weekend.

Founded by Mr. Felder in 1997, the Slee Sinfonietta is the in-house, professional orchestra of the Center for 21st-Century Music. It can be a small group of soloists one day and an orchestra the next, depending on the works being performed.

"Such flexibility allows for diverse repertoire," he says. "Our mandate is to present neglected repertoire."

Unfortunately, neglected could describe most contemporary classical composers, which is what drives the likes of Mr. Felder and the co-directors of Pitt's Music on the Edge concert series, composers Mat Rosenblum and Eric Moe. They are committed to getting the word out on the vibrant music being written today by those composing in the art-music tradition. Slee Sinfonietta's appearance on the Pitt series will do just that with a concert of Donald Erb's "Sunlit Peaks and Dark Valleys," Mr. Felder's "Another Face," Andrew Rindfleisch's "What Vibes!" and Mr. Rosenblum's "Ancient Eyes."

"Slee Sinfonietta is a crackerjack ensemble," says Mr. Rosenblum. It better be, as it will be asked to use pitches outside the 12 notes of the chromatic scale (the white and black keys on a piano) when it performs "Ancient Eyes." This special tuning is not for effect but an approach to music that is core to Mr. Rosenblum's aesthetic. And it was how this music came to him at a special time of his life. "Ancient Eyes was written during the months directly before and after the birth of my daughter and reflects some of the thoughts and emotions I was experiencing at that time."

In contrast, Mr. Erb's composition for violin, clarinet and piano is partly inspired by a public event, and a catastrophic one: "the bombing of the Federal building in Oklahoma City and the murder of the children," he writes in program notes.

Slee Sinfonietta may deal in neglected repertoire, but the music draws on issues just as universal and relevant as any music, something it will look to impart as it opens the Music on the Edge season this weekend.

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