

Musical feast blends old, new, with emphasis on the newer

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NEWS CONTRIBUTING REVIEWER

Every piece of music is new at some point, but nobody can guarantee its continued existence.

Sometimes it will evaporate into the ether—or a dustbin — or have a short but ecstatic shelf life. Top 10 lists are full of those. There's also the possibility that a piece of music may fade in and out of popularity only to reappear decades or centuries later to a new audience.

Then there are those items that shape the music of the future in ways the present can't imagine.

All of this is a way of leading into Sunday afternoon's program, "A Musical Feast," in the Burchfield Penney Art Center. Co-sponsored by the Robert and Carol Morris Center for 21st Century Music, this concert was a blend of old and new, with an emphasis on new and newer.

Charles Haupt, the series founder and former concertmaster of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, noted that the concert had a "very adventurous program for you today." David Felder, composer and director of the June in Buffalo Festival, followed and used words like "sophistication," "smart," "very beautiful" and "quite an accomplishment" to describe the music to come.

They were both right, but for the most part, the lasting worth of the music heard will be judged by the future rather than the present, especially since there were a couple of world premiere performances on the bill.

John Bacon's flair for jazz and modern classical music is a recognized fact in the Western New York community, where, as a percussionist and composer, he has taught and performed in a number of situations over the years.

His latest work, "Wind, Water, Metal, Skin," is a marvelous duet for flute (played by Barry Crawford) and prepared vibraphone (with Bacon wielding the mallets). Additional

instruments used included what appeared to be the bow from a bass violin that Bacon drew across some of the bars on his vibes for a humming effect and a couple of bottles filled with various levels of liquid, which produced tones when blown across the mouthpiece. There was a pleasant, Zen-like quality to the overall piece. The audience was appreciative.

Pianist Eric Huebner, who would show up repeatedly throughout the program, is a talented musician, able to do justice to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's "Fantasy" in D minor, which served as a classic buffer to the following piece, a song cycle, "Descriptions of the Moon," by Nathan Heidelberger, which received its debut Sunday afternoon.

Mezzo Julia Bentley has an impressive range and sells each piece she performs, emoting physically and vocally. Accompanied by Huebner, she did her best to push Heidelberger's approach to texts about the moon written by the poets and prose artists who inspired the composer. Some of it worked. Best of all were the settings of Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Girls Melancholy," and "Simples," with words by James Joyce. But other sections revealed a voice still looking for an individuality that may come in later works.

After the intermission, Bentley and Huebner came back to perform "Ich will ein Garten sein," a lovely post-Romantic tune drawn from a song cycle by Ruth Schonthal, which preceded an impressive tour-de-force reading of Bernard Rand's "Memo 7." The latter, a solo piece performed by Bentley, had her sobbing, giggling, sighing, gasping, laughing and emoting — all to deliver one of the most moving 21st century pieces (it was written in 2000) on the program.

Closing out the program was Elliott Carter's "Night Fantasies," an energy-packed piano piece that occupied Huebner for nearly 25 minutes. One of the interesting things about the performance was that Heidelberger served to turn the pages of the score for Huebner, an opportunity for the young composer to follow along with the pianist as they wended their way through an important score by an acknowledged American master.

Concert Review

A Musical Feast

Sunday afternoon in the Burchfield Penney Art Center, 1300 Elmwood Ave.