

The Gusto Blog

The Continuing Triumph of June in Buffalo

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"June in Buffalo, Morty?"

That was John Cage, at the very first of the extraordinary State University of New York at Buffalo Festivals publicly chiding and teasing his old friend Morton Feldman for supposed pretentiousness. They were together talking to music students about whatever might be on their minds.

What Feldman had done in creating the summertime New Music festival is still one of the highlights of Buffalo's annual music season today. What Feldman was creating was, in fact, intended to be an annual New Music festival like the famous festival in Darmstadt, Germany. Many would say it has long since passed it.

But the very name "June in Buffalo" couldn't possibly be more typically Feldman. It's from the same style of generic matter-of-factness that characterizes so many of Feldman's titles for his works: "Violin and String Quartet," "Piano and Orchestra," "Five Pianos," "Violin and Orchestra" (which is about to be released in two weeks in a rather brilliant new recording on the ECM label.)

Ever since the festival began 38 years ago, it has done--brilliantly--what Feldman envisioned it doing: drawing the cream of New Music composers and performers to Buffalo to perform and interact with advanced State University at Buffalo music students.

Nothing could be more appropriate than beginning this year's festival with the performance of a work by Morton Feldman, the festival's creator and early guiding light (until his tragically early death in 1986). Tonight's

concerts --which expects to sell out--will begin at 7 p.m. in a most unlikely but rather wonderfully Buffalonian venue, at One M&T Plaza, more familiar as a home to downtown pop music affairs. What will be performed will be the entirety of Feldman's "String Quartet No. 1" in performance by festival resident musicians the JACK Quartet. (RSVP's are recommended at 716-645-0624.)

Tomorrow's concert will include performances of Iannis Xenakis' "Kottos for Solo Cello," Roger Reynolds' "imAge/E and image/E," Edgar Varese's haunting solo flute piece "Density 21.5" arranged for Theremin Cello by Jonathan Golove, Elliott Carter's Sonata for Cello and Piano, selections from Gyorgi Ligeti's "Etudes" and the world premiere of Eric Wubbel's new work "Psychomechanochronometer" which was commissioned with support from the Mikhashoff Trust for New Music. Soloists for the concert will be pianist Eric Huebner, cellist and Theremin cellist Jonathan Golove. The concert will take place at 8:30 p.m. tomorrow in Slee Hall at the State University at Buffalo.

Saturday's Slee Hall concert will feature the Talujon Ensemble performing Brian Ferneyhough's "Fanfare for Klaus Huber," Charles Wuorinen's "Marimba Variations," Marc Mellits' "Gravity," Ross Bauer's "Echometry" and Xenakis' "Okho."

The finale of the festival June 9 at 2:30 p.m. will feature solo pianist Geoffrey Bursleson and the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by JoAnn Falletta. It too will take place in Slee Hall.

--Jeff Simon