

# Flying cymbal highlights show

*Glitch brought needed levity to arid performance by resident group*

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*News Music Critic*

One of June in Buffalo's resident groups, the New Millennium Ensemble, took the stage of Allen Hall on Wednesday evening in a program of works by eight of the resident composers. Most were probably premieres, but the printed programs this year give nothing beyond title and composer, not even the number of movements.

The ensemble consists of flutist Tara Helen O'Connor, clarinetist Marianne Gythfeldt, violinist Sunghae Anna Lim, cellist Joshua Gordon, pianist Margaret Kampmeier and percussionist John Ferrari. Bradley Lubman conducted five of the works.

With all this new music to prepare, it's understandable that there might be a glitch or two in the performance, one of which formed both the conclusion and a highlight of the evening. In the final percussive broadside in Andrew Rindfleisch's "Fanatical Dances," Ferrari whacked a cymbal so hard that it flew off the stand and landed on the floor with an extra crash, to general laughter.

Candidly, the evening could have used a few more moments of levity. Although the performances were generally excellent, much of the music was both difficult and arid. Consequently, I have a stronger memory of how hard the musicians worked than of how much musical satisfaction they were able to deliver.

The five works for full ensemble

## REVIEW

### June in Buffalo Festival

The New Millennium Ensemble plays works of June in Buffalo resident composers.

Wednesday evening in Allen Hall, University at Buffalo South Campus. To be broadcast at 4 p.m. Sunday, WBFO-FM (88.7).

ble were generally earnest, energetic and deadly serious, but they also tended to be rhetorical, unspontaneous and perfunctory. In other words, dull. Thinking back, it's hard to differentiate these works one from another.

By contrast, the three smaller pieces seemed to have more character. David Lefkowitz's three-movement Quartet for violin, cello, flute and piano stood out for its poised, purposeful quality. It moved relentlessly ahead on wings of ostinato figures, quasi-Oriental flavors, punctuating jabs and accents, effectively modulating tempos, some interior piano strumming and stalking piano lines.

Another Quartet by Margaret McAllister, this one for flute, clarinet, violin and cello, was the most spacious piece on the program, opening and closing with quiet, reflective, pondering clarinet solos. Very gestural in demeanor, the central part of the work seemed a sort of tentative, stuttering atonal conversation among the instruments, refreshing in its openness and unself-consciousness.

Jeffrey Kowalkowski's "Aufhebung" (Abolition) for violin and marimba offered a fine textural contrast. Violin lines that were either fast and angular, naively tuneful or turning harsh in mercurial changes were all partnered by soft-malleted marimba trills and runs. There were balance problems, though, which found the marimba alternately dominating the violin then barely audible.

Greg D'Alessio's "Later Still" seemed little more than a continuum of agitated, random noodling with a deceptively ethereal opening; Laura Schwendinger's "Fable" opened and closed elegantly, like Faure updated to the 1990s, but had a darker, more turbulent main message; and Susan Harding's "Earliest Sky" was rather furtive in its opening gestures but soon was subsumed in heaving dynamic changes without much in the way of logical progression.

After a surprisingly consonant introduction, Richard Festinger's "A Serenade for Six" became predominantly prickly and pointillist in texture, and chattery in line, with a drifting, cogitating slow movement at its center. And Rindfleisch's closing "Fanatical Dances" was dominated by periodic barges of percussion, proceeding in waves of energy with disembodied atonal expanses and an occasional graceful phrase. The fanatical aspects were obvious, but the anything remotely dance-like eluded my ears.