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Buffalo as Music Mecca

By [ALLAN KOZINN](#)

BUFFALO — If you think that new music thrives mostly at Tanglewood, Aspen and Ojai during the summer, Buffalo may seem a bit off the beaten path. But this city in western New York has a venerable new-music tradition that goes back at least to 1963, when the composer and conductor [Lukas Foss](#) took over the directorship of the Buffalo Philharmonic. A year later a Rockefeller Foundation grant helped establish the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts, which lured other composers to the University of Buffalo before it folded in 1980, not least among them [Morton Feldman](#).

In 1975, Feldman began a new-music festival, [June in Buffalo](#), that has become one of the country's most important, if also an often-overlooked one. Every year about 70 young composers (the University of Buffalo calls them “emerging” composers) apply to become participants at the festival; about 20 are accepted. They spend a week in master classes and seminars with their better established elders, and hear their works performed by starry new-music ensembles like, this year, Signal and the Arditti Quartet.

This year the festival is celebrating its 35th anniversary, though an asterisk is required. Feldman ran it from 1975 to 1980, but there was no festival in 1979, when he took a sabbatical. (That said, the new-music pianist Yvar Mikhashoff kept the spirit alive that year by performing 29 recent works in three programs.) After 1980, Feldman lost interest in the festival, and it was not held again until 1986, when the composer David Felder — still its director — revived it.

This year's festival runs from Monday through Sunday. I'll be covering the first few days — through Thursday — which include workshops on recording and computer music, lectures by [Steve Reich](#) and Mr. Felder, and performances by Signal (including an all-Reich program), the Ensemble SurPlus (which specializes in the thornier side of the contemporary repertory), the Slee Sinfonietta and the Arditti Quartet. The schedule for the final days includes more from the Arditti, and performances by the Ensemble Laboratorim and the Buffalo Philharmonic, conducted by JoAnn Falletta.