

American Ensemble

Modern Men

Tetras, Iannis Xenakis's 1983 string quartet, is as knotty an example of modernism as exists. It begins with a violin solo that's halfway between a devil's trill and an ambulance siren; it ends with all four instruments fading away as if dissolving into oblivion. In an unsympathetic interpretation, *Tetras* might well seem forbiddingly harsh. But as the **JACK Quartet** performs it, the piece emerges as soulful, surprisingly playful and full of visceral intensity.

Difficult modern and contemporary music is the JACK Quartet's lifeblood. The quartet grew out of the Eastman School of Music, where all four members—Christopher Otto and Ari Streisfeld, violins; John Pickford Richards, viola; and Kevin McFarland, cello—participated actively in *Ossia*, a student-run new music group. They first got together as a group as part of a birthday celebration for Samuel Adler, playing the composer's fourth string quartet, but had no plans to carry the partnership forward.

BELOW,
LEFT TO RIGHT:
ARI STREISFELD,
JOHN PICKFORD
RICHARDS,
KEVIN MCFARLAND
AND
CHRISTOPHER OTTO



Things changed in the summer of 2004, though, when they went to Morelia, Mexico, to take part in a contemporary music festival. Composer Helmut Lachenmann was in residence, and the four musicians tackled his newest work, the String Quartet No. 3 ("Grido"). The piece was "insanely difficult," according to Streisfeld, but the quartet's mastery of it had its effect. They found an ally in Lachenmann, and they were invited to 2005 Lucerne Festival Academy to work with Pierre Boulez and the Ensemble Inter-contemporain.

There were now officially a quartet, but they needed a name. Eventually they hit upon "JACK"—an acronym for the initials of their first names. "It serves us well and it's easy to remember," says Streisfeld. "We're four American guys named 'JACK.' The music we play may be very intense and challenging, but for us as well as the listeners, it's good we have a little humor in our name."

Although the JACK Quartet made its reputation with daunting avant-garde music, its repertoire has broadened to include more tonal, neo-Romantic contemporary composers like Philip Glass and Caleb Burhans. The musicians have also reached back through the centuries to program Machaut and Gesualdo—composers whose visionary works seem to anticipate modern music. The expansion in their focus is partly a result of success.

"We started playing at a university, mainly for the composers there," Streisfeld explains. "We could program crazy avant-garde music, and the crowd would go wild. Now we're being asked to play on more mainstream series, which is wonderful for us. Those presenters are really interested in having us, but they want to make sure they don't scare the audience away.

"Our goal," he adds, "is to bring contemporary music to the greater chamber music world."

www.jackquartet.com

Music About Music

Strata's November 21 performance of Stephen Paulus's *Trio Concertant (Five Movements for Three Friends)* was not only a world premiere but also the launch of a new initiative: the Metaclassical Music Project, aimed at commissioning works that fit the label "meta-classical."

The term is the invention of James Stern, the trio's violinist/violist. "If you want a definition of 'metaclassical' in a nutshell, it's music about music," Stern says. "It's music that somehow manages to make references to its own conventions, its own history or its own construction." The self-referential nature of the commissions will make them appropriate for both the recital hall and the classroom. It's an important consideration for the ensemble, which consists of Stern, pianist Audrey Andrist (his wife) and clarinetist Nathan Williams: teaching has been integral to the trio's activities since its 1992 founding.

"We don't absolutely *need* composers to help us with this: we are already highly adept at finding things in the existing repertoire that we want to teach people about," says Stern. "But composers have certain resources at their fingertips that we as performers don't have. They'll have ideas that they want audiences to be aware of."

Ideally, the new works will similarly serve an educational purpose, but also transcend it.

"I hope another thing comes out of this," Stern continues. "What happens when composers set out to write a piece having a didactic intention? How can this forward their self-expression in ways they don't expect?" He cites Britten's *Young People's Guide to the Orchestra* as a clear example: with narration, it's a pedagogical piece about instrumentation, but it can also be played as *Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Henry Purcell*—a virtuoso orchestral showpiece.

Similarly, Strata played *Trio Concertant* straight through in Merkin Hall, where it functioned as an abstract piece of concert music. But the trio



STRATA, (L TO R): JAMES STERN,
NATHAN WILLIAMS AND AUDREY ANDRIST

also intends to use it in pedagogical settings. Paulus's specific intent in the piece was to explore the nature of contrasts; when the musicians present it to young audiences, they'll demonstrate contrasts in pitch, loudness and timbre, explain how they create musical tension, and discuss the relation between musical conflict and human drama.

Trio Concertant also answers another Strata priority: creating substantial works for the string/clarinet/piano ensemble. "We wanted a piece with developed and powerful emotional trajectory to it," says Stern. Works for this trio combination tend to be short—roughly 15 to 20 minutes, partly in imitation of Bartók's 1938 *Contrasts*, the first important work for these forces. Paulus's initial plan was for a five-movement work within those dimensions, but the trio asked for two extra movements. Now clocking in at nearly a half hour, the work is scaled to fill the second half of a concert program.

"In taking on this project—writing music that is *about* music and *teaches* people about music," Stern says, "composers might stumble upon a mode of expression that really has a high aesthetic value."
www.stratamusic.org



TULSA PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

Immersion Technique

The Concertante sextet recently played a program, under the aegis of **Chamber Music Tulsa**, at the Tulsa Boys Home—a facility for kids with behavioral and substance-abuse problems. For most of the boys, it was their first experience of chamber music; some of them had never heard live music of any kind. The musicians certainly didn't know what to expect, anticipating anything from apathy to outright hostility. They were unprepared for the enthusiasm of the response: the kids peppered the musicians with questions about their lives and careers, and begged them at the end to play another piece. It was all the organizers could to get the musicians out of the room in time to make a flight.

That kind of outreach is a key part of Chamber Music Tulsa's operations. The organization brings in six ensembles a season for three-day weekends that amount to chamber music immersions. Aside from participating in outreach activities, each ensemble gives two concerts at the Tulsa Performing Arts Center. Sunday afternoons are the time for traditional full programs, held in the 430-seat John H. Williams Theatre. Saturday nights are given over to by-subscription-only "salon concerts" for an audience of roughly 120 in the Kathleen P. Westby Pavilion. These start with a wine reception; the audience sits at café

tables for an hour-long performance, followed by a light supper and a chance to meet and chat with the artists.

CMT also fosters home-grown activities. In collaboration with Tulsa's Barthelmes Conservatory of Music last year, the organization started Tulsa Young Chamber Musicians—a series of concerts in unusual venues across the city, featuring local conservatory students, most of them playing in chamber ensembles for the first time—to audiences that have never experienced chamber music before. "Our whole mission is to promote chamber music through the through the music itself and education," says Pam Carter, CMT's president.

The organization was founded in 1954 under the name "Concertime." Although Tulsa is a regional cultural mecca, fueled by oil money, with its own opera and ballet companies, symphony orchestra and museums and a thriving theater scene, through much of CMT's history it was known only to a core of chamber music fans. Carter herself admits that the organization was "hidden away" when she first encountered it seven years ago.

The name change to "Chamber Music Tulsa" came in 2001, and with it a new emphasis on strategic planning, marketing, and audience-building. Like many chamber music presenters, CMT is faced with an aging audience; but it is working to attract younger people to its offerings. To take one endeavor: as part of its upcoming February visit, the youthful Trio Cavatina will play at a gathering of Tulsa's Young Professionals, a local business group. The Valentine's Day-themed presentation will include works by a pair of famous lovers: Clara and Robert Schumann.

Says Carter: "We want to let audiences know that chamber music can touch them to the core of the soul."

www.chambermusictulsa.org

Horn Call

Vincent Chancey states it flat-out on his website: “The French horn is my natural voice.” He knew from the first that that the instrument was his destiny. “I grew to love the sound at a very young age,” he says. “It has a kind of lyrical expressiveness. It can be assertive, but it’s not in-your-face aggression. It’s the instrument that represents my personality.”

His training on the horn was in classical music. But Chancey was determined to become a jazz musician. “All my teachers said that if I wanted to play jazz, I needed to switch to a different instrument,” he says. “I’d like to say that I proved them wrong.”

For Chancey, the key to using the horn in jazz is to honor its natural properties while staying in jazz territory. “Even though I love the saxophone and the trumpet, I’m not trying to emulate those sounds,” he says. “The whole jazz repertoire has patterns and licks [from those instruments] that formulate the music. It’s good to have those at your command—while being aware that the French horn is different. You have to strike a balance between working with the instrument and its natural sound, and the language that is used to play jazz.”

Chancey has had a long and distinguished career as an ensemble musician, performing with the Sun Ra Arkestra, the Carla Bley Band and Lester Bowie’s Brass Fantasy. He has accompanied Aretha Franklin, Elvis Costello and Dave Douglas, among many others, and served as a sideman on more than 150 albums. But Chancey has also worked to make the French horn a lead instrument, fronting his own bands. (His current groups are the Vincent Chancey Quartet and the Phat Chance Trio.) In 2010 he received a CMA/FACE French American Jazz Exchange grant to collaborate with French guitarist Serge Pesce on a compositional project.

Chancey is certainly not the first on his instrument to venture into jazz: he cites his late teacher Julius Watkins as a trailblazer. But the concept still seems risky to some presenters and record companies. “People have stereotypes of this music,” says Chancey. “You have to prove yourself and stand on your head. But I can’t take no for an answer. I’m not going to put my horn in the closet and walk away. It’s my task to put my instrument out there in jazz.”

www.vincentchancey.com



Flute Magic

Alexandra Hawley has the flute in her DNA. Her mother, Frances Blaisdell, was a pioneer—a professional flutist at a time when women weren't expected to play the instrument, one of the first female wind players with the New York Philharmonic, and a soloist who performed with everyone from Lily Pons to the Rockettes. Hawley's parents (her father was Alexander Williams, the Philharmonic's first clarinetist in the 1930s) gave her a piccolo when she was three. When she was five, she gave her first public performance, joining her mother onstage for an encore, and boasting afterward, "I think they clapped more for me."

"They didn't let me on stage for years after that," Hawley says. That childhood setback aside, Hawley has devoted her life to playing and teaching the flute. She has long been a faculty member at Stanford University and is a founding member of the Stanford Woodwind Quintet.

One of her chief accomplishments is **Avedis**, an annual four-concert series, now in its 26th season. It grew out of a plan that Hawley had formed with pianist Robert Avedis Hagopian, a colleague of hers at Stanford, to start a chamber music series. Hagopian died before the plan could be carried out—an early casualty of the AIDS crisis—but Hawley decided to carry the idea forward. She dedicated the series to his memory and used his middle name, meaning "good news" in Armenian, as its moniker. But she decided to gear the series toward her own instrument. Avedis is now the only concert series in the country dedicated to chamber music for flute.

The concerts take place in the Florence Gould Theater, a 316-seat jewel-box theater in San Francisco's Legion of Honor, a muse-

um that houses an extraordinary collection of European art. (Movie buffs will recognize the building as one of Kim Novak's haunts in *Vertigo*.) Concertgoers get museum admission along with the price of a ticket. Avedis also gives blocks of tickets to local colleges and AIDS organizations.

One key to Avedis's success has been Hawley's diligence in researching flute chamber repertoire. "I've found some gems, but you have to do a lot of digging," she says. She has discovered rarities like Ludwig Thuille's Brahmsian Sextet for Piano and Winds; a 2007 performance was so enthusiastically received that the group is bringing it back this season. The series will also feature works by Robert Muczynski, the American composer who just died this past year, and a tribute to two American woman composers: Amy Beach and Nancy Bloomer Deussen. "It's been a joy to explore this repertoire," says Hawley.

www.avedisconcerts.org



ALEXANDRA HAWLEY

SEGUES

Cellist **Yo-Yo Ma** has been named one of the 15 recipients of the 2010 Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

The Orchestra of St. Luke's has appointed its executive director, **Katy Clark**, to succeed Marianne Lockwood, who co-founded the ensemble 36 years ago.

Naxos has named **Andy Doe** chief operating officer. Doe, who will work out of Naxos's U.K. offices, was in charge of classical music at iTunes and has worked for Universal Classics & Jazz, Classical.com, and the Contemporary Music Centre, Ireland.

Bonnie Barrett has been appointed director of **Yamaha Artist Services, Inc.** Barrett was most recently vice president of **Barrett Vantage Artists**.

Angela Myles Beeching has stepped down from her position as director of the New England Conservatory Career Services Center to launch an independent consulting practice.

Composer **David T. Little** is the new executive director for **Music at the Anthology (MATA)**, succeeding Missy Mazzoli, who left the position to focus on composition and performance.

Community MusicWorks, founded by **Providence String Quartet** violist Sebastian Ruth, received a 2010 National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award in November. The program provides free after-school education and performance programs in Providence, RI.

David Chambless Worters is the new president and chief executive officer of the **Van Cliburn Foundation**. For the previous 11 years, Worters served as president and CEO of the North Carolina Symphony in Raleigh.

In Memoriam

Rudolf Barshai, violist, Borodin Quartet; founding conductor, Moscow Chamber Orchestra

Eric Berman, tubist, bassist, Kapelye; San Antonio Symphony, American Symphony, American Concert Band

Marion Brown, saxophonist

Buddy Collette, saxophonist, flutist, clarinetist and bandleader

Henryk Mikolaj Gorecki, composer

Byron Gustafson, managing partner, Opus 3 Artists

Arthur Jarvinen, composer, percussionist, bassist, publisher

Steve Jones, New York State Council on the Arts

Buddy Morrow, trombonist and band-leader; Buddy Morrow Orchestra, Tommy Dorsey Orchestra

Harvey Phillips, founding tubist, New York Brass Quintet

Adam Pinsker, manager; arts administrator, New York Chamber Symphony and the New York Philomusica Chamber Ensemble

Sidney Stafford, pianist; programmer, South Bay Chamber Music Society

Howard Van Hyning, percussionist, New York City Opera; gong collector

Shirley Verrett, soprano

Dolores Wilson, soprano

A Man for All Enterprises

When Harvey Phillips died this past October at the age of 80, the chamber music world lost one of its giants. Called the Paganini (and sometimes the Heifetz) of the tuba, he was—among his many roles—a founder of the New York Brass Quintet and an early board member of Chamber Music America.

by John Swallow

Much has been said over the years about Harvey Phillips; and now that he has passed, much more will be said in the days ahead. His musicality was so much larger than the tuba. His musicianship towered over its many clichéd identities. His presence in a chamber music setting enhanced the group and everyone in it. To me, he was a prime example of a player who does everything possible to help others sound their best.

William Bell, the great tuba virtuoso, having heard Harvey perform with the Barnum & Bailey Circus Band, invited him to join his class at Juilliard. Since that time, more than fifty years ago, Harvey's contribution to contemporary and brass chamber music has been immense. Alec Wilder, Gunther Schuller, Vincent Persichetti, Hershey Kaye, and Eddie Sauter are just a few of the composers, orchestrators, and arrangers who wrote what they wrote for tuba because Harvey would be there to play it.

Not only was he an instrumentalist with a uniquely broad spectrum of repertoire and taste, he was a man with a vision that challenged his contemporaries. His dear friend and mentor, the horn virtuoso John Barrows, once remarked that anyone or any organization that paid Harvey just to *think* about how they could improve their endeavors would be repaid many times over.

Near the end of his tenure as vice president

of The New England Conservatory, Harvey must have decided it was time to catch up on his solo recitaling. He booked Carnegie Recital Hall to perform a week of tuba recitals during which he performed many of the major solo tuba works of that time. What an audacious gesture just at the time of his entry into academia as a “professor” of his instrument.

Harvey was skilled in so many areas that it was difficult for him to decide where to turn his energies. An editor, administrator, manager, and contractor, he ultimately decided to accept an appointment as a professor at Indiana University. This brought him back into the pedagogical mainstream as an advocate for his instrument and all

who play it. His nationwide gatherings each fall and winter at “Octubafest” and “Tuba Christmas” both had the tongue-in-cheek promotionalism so characteristic of his insights and creativity.

Whenever brass players hear the words, “Harvey said...,” one seldom hears the query, “Harvey who?”

John Swallow was the trombonist of the New York Brass Quintet from 1958 to 1984.

BELOW: HARVEY PHILLIPS, CA. 1992, SEATED IN FRONT OF NEW YORK BRASS QUINTET COLLEAGUES JOHN SWALLOW, ALLAN DEAN, PAUL INGRAHAM, AND ROBERT NAGEL.

