

## Wonderful Life

Los Angeles in the 1940s and '50's was a mecca for composers and other emigré artists from war-ravaged Europe. It was in this rich cultural milieu that the nascent Westwood Wind Quintet emerged. Peter Christ, the founding oboist, and David Atkins, founding clarinetist, met as teenagers in Peter Meremblum's California Junior Symphony. Atkins attended USC (where the orchestra conductor was Ingolf Dahl) and then UCLA (orchestra director, Lukas Foss), where Peter Christ was also a student. A little later, the clarinetist met Gretel Shanley—"a fabulous flutist"—in Henri Temianka's chamber orchestra. With the addition of bassoonist David Breidenthal and Alan Guse on French horn, the Westwood Wind Quintet was born in 1959. The ensemble was "Peter's brainchild," says Atkins, and the oboist has remained its chief entrepreneurial spirit ever since.

Over the next decade, the Westwoods were being booked by university presenters and performing on the new-music series Evenings on the Roof (later to become the famed Monday Evening Concerts at Los Angeles County Museum of Art). "When Robert Craft heard us play Schoenberg's quintet there," says Atkins, "he engaged us to record it for Columbia Records. We rehearsed in Stravinsky's house."

For five or six years during this period, the group's earnings were boosted by hundreds of school concerts, sponsored by the Music Bureau of the City of Los Angeles and, later, by Orange County. "We did as many as six a day," says Christ. The quintet also began to tour the West Coast, but its members always supplemented their income with movie and studio recording jobs, and by teaching.

Yes, there were several personnel changes in the bassoon and horn positions, but the group's core remained impressively constant. After 19 years, Gretel Shanley was succeeded by John Barcellona. And Barcellona—now director of

woodwind studies at Bob Cole Conservatory of Music at Cal State, Long Beach—has occupied the flutist's chair for more than three decades.

At one point, though, the quintet seemed to have breathed its last. That was about 14 years ago, when Atkins moved to Washington State. The group disbanded for five years. "I thought we were history," recalls Barcellona, "and I missed it terribly." Then Peter Christ found a new bassoonist, clarinetist and horn player. Two years ago, Calvin Smith, their horn player for 15 years, returned to the fold.

In its 51st year, with its members living in three different states, the Westwoods have scaled way back on concertizing. "Now we are a recording band," says Barcellona. Through Christ's company, Crystal Records, the ensemble has recorded a large portion of the repertoire,



including all of Anton Reicha's Wind Quintets (16 of the 24 have been released on 9 discs, and Christ is busy editing and remastering the rest). Planned for this spring are recordings of Jean-Michel Damase's *17 Variations* and Alvin Etler's two Wind Quintets. ("They're fabulous, but nobody plays them," says Christ.)

"Life changes," says Barcellona. "But it has all been really wonderful."

[www.crystalrecords.com](http://www.crystalrecords.com)

THE WESTWOODS  
AT THEIR 50TH  
ANNIVERSARY  
CELEBRATION:  
PETER CHRIST,  
JOHN BARCELLONA,  
PATRICIA NELSON,  
CALVIN SMITH,  
FOUNDING  
CLARINETIST  
DAVID ATKINS;  
AND  
EUGENE ZORO

# American Ensemble

## Introducing Mr. Beethoven

You would think, after more than two centuries of Beethoven performances, that there would be no new music left to discover. But a concert by the **Beethoven Project Trio** in Chicago last year featured two works believed to be American premieres, and one billed as a world premiere.

The Beethoven Project Trio is the brainchild of George Lepauw, a French-American pianist who has made the composer a specialty. When Dominique Prévot, president of the Beethoven Association of France, alerted him to the existence of a Piano Trio in E-flat Major that had no known previous performances, Lepauw decided to assemble a trio to perform it, along with other Beethoven works. He invited violinist Sang Mee Lee and pianist Wendy Warner to

form a trio dedicated to Beethoven's works.

The ensemble debuted last April at The Murphy Auditorium in Chicago, in a program featuring the three unfamiliar works, along with the Archduke Trio. The most substantial rarity was one of the American premieres: another E-flat trio, Op. 63, a transcription of the Op. 4 String Quintet. It had long been believed that the arrangement was carried out by other hands, but a current school of thought attributes the transcription to Beethoven himself. "At the time Beethoven was writing, a lot of pub-

lishers would try to make some extra money by rearranging popular compositions so that more people would buy the score," says Lepauw. "On the few occasions that publishers did this for Beethoven's work, they'd be sure to receive a nasty letter from him." The Op. 63 trio, Lepauw notes, "was published by his very dear publisher, Artaria—only a few blocks away from where Beethoven lived. And in 1819, when he was called upon to make a complete catalog of his works, he accepted it on the list—which he would not have done if it were not authentic."

The other American premiere was the D Major Trio, Kinsky/Halm Anhang 3—a fragment once attributed to Mozart (it even has a Köchel number). Composer Robert McConnell filled in the missing pages, in Beethovenian style, for the group's performance. But the concert's big event was the Piano Trio in E-flat, Hess 47, an arrangement of the Op. 3 String Trio—billed as a world premiere. The work has always been considered a fragment, since only the first movement and 43 measures of the second exist in manuscript form. But that first movement is 12 minutes long, making it substantial enough for performance.

The premieres presented a unique challenge to the performers. "A contemporary piece may be problematic—but nobody knows what to expect from it," says Lepauw. "But we were in a strange situation: people have an expectation of what [Beethoven's works] should be and how they should be played. It took us some time to find the sound of each piece. We wanted to do something for Mr. Beethoven that was our best attempt."

The Trio repeats the program May 18 in New York, at Alice Tully Hall. And it is in the midst of a project to perform all of Beethoven's trios and record them under the supervision of producer Max Wilcox. "It's hard to say people need to know more about Beethoven, yet there are so many miscategorizations," says Lepauw. "Certainly most people don't have that many opportunities to hear the trios. Our mission is to perform the complete trios as much as possible, in as many places as possible."

[www.beethovenprojecttrio.com](http://www.beethovenprojecttrio.com)



GEORGE LEPAUW,  
WENDY WARNER  
AND SANG MEE LEE  
OF THE BEETHOVEN  
PROJECT TRIO.

## Connecticut Crowd Pleaser

Summer means jazz in Connecticut's rural Litchfield County. Each August, thousands of people gather in the town of Kent, on the grounds of the Kent School, for the three-day **Litchfield Jazz Festival**. The festival caps the month-long Litchfield Jazz Camp, which offers 350 people—mostly kids and teenagers, but available to people of all ages—a chance to play during the festival itself in a side tent, while the main stage hosts a roster of jazz's elite.

Both enterprises are the work of founder and executive director Vita West Muir. They grew out of a classical chamber music series that Muir started presenting in the living room of her historic eighteenth-century home in Litchfield. The series eventually moved to a local church and lasted for nearly two decades; but by the mid-1990s, it was faltering: "It occurred to me that the audience was not just figuratively, but *literally* dying," says Muir. Her solution was to take advantage of Litchfield County's thriving warm-weather tourist industry, and move the music to the summer.

The question was what to present. "I didn't want to compete with [Connecticut neighbors] like Music Mountain and Yale at Norfolk," she says. "Folk music? I didn't have a real feeling for it. Then I thought: 'What about jazz?'" She gave herself a crash course in jazz, consulting with local deejays, hopping into Manhattan and even visiting New Orleans to immerse herself in the contemporary jazz scene. With seed money from the Connecticut Commission for the Arts, a nature preserve, and a local travel council, she launched her festival in 1996 with artists such as J.J. Johnson, Terence Blanchard and the young Diana Krall. The jazz camp, initially a weeklong endeavor with 35 students, got its start the next summer.

The tradition of presenting top-flight musicians continues in 2010. And so does another Litchfield tradition: putting together a diverse slate. This year's performers will range from the Mario Pavone Orange Double Tenor Sextet to Béla Fleck, Zakir Hussain and Edgar Meyer; from the Arturo O'Farrill Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra to the Dave

Brubeck Quartet. "Jazz is a lot more things than I ever thought it was," says Muir. "We try to cover the waterfront on styles. People are going to nod off if you don't give them variety."

Some of the more experimental offerings sometimes anger conservative members of the audience, but Muir takes the controversy in stride. "The last thing we want to do is not expose people to that music," she says. "The idea is to raise your own audience." [www.litchfieldjazzfest.com](http://www.litchfieldjazzfest.com)



STUDENTS AT LITCHFIELD'S JAZZ CAMP

## Saxophone Ambassadors

The **Mana Quartet** made a bit of history last year,

when it became the first saxophone quartet to win the grand prize at the Coleman International Chamber Music Competition. The award not only gave the young musicians an august classical music accolade—but it brought a new kind of attention and respect to the saxophone quartet literature.

“People don’t know these pieces,” says Michael Mortarotti, the group’s alto saxophonist. “The Coleman prize—obviously, that’s great. It was our goal from the very beginning, making sure that good pieces got heard.”

The quartet started as a student ensemble, with three of its current members at Northern Arizona University in 2004; it then reconvened at Florida State University’s saxophone studio. The four musicians are now far-flung geographically: Mortarotti lives in L.A.; Dannel Espinoza (baritone sax) in Rochester; Michael Hernandez (soprano) and Josh Mayer (tenor) in Phoenix. They get together each month to rehearse, and record each session. Espinoza then edits out the chatter and uploads the sound files for his colleagues, giving the musicians a chance to assess their own work. “It gives us all a chance individually to hear what runs through the piece, and what it actually sounds like in the room,” says Mortarotti.

The ensemble has an active touring schedule and a Naxos CD in the works. At the end of May, it will start its second annual residency at Arkansas’s Hot Springs Music Festival. But when discussing the quartet, Mortarotti concentrates less on concerts and projects than about the repertoire he and his colleagues are exploring. When he talks about pieces like the saxophone concertos of Philip Glass and Tristan Keuris, or Charles Wuorinen’s Saxophone Quartet (“a series of undulating presentations that unfold”), or Mathew

Rosenblum’s *Mobius Loop* (“It’s contemporary, with quarter tones, but with a Latin influence that makes it accessible for the audience”), he speaks with a music lover’s zeal.

The quartet is working with contemporary composers to generate new repertory. “We don’t have a bunch of quartets by Beethoven and a bunch of quartets by Bartók,” says Mortarotti. “We’re willing to try things. Any composer willing to write for a saxophone quartet—the music’s going to get played.”

The group’s name? It comes from the Biblical word for the bread that provided sustenance in the desert for the Israelites. As the musicians see it, *mana* has a spiritual connotation. “It’s a force for something powerful,” says Mortarotti. “We want to be a force for elevating the status of the saxophone.”

[www.manaquartet.com](http://www.manaquartet.com)



THE MANA QUARTET, L TO R: JOSH MEYERS, MICHAEL HERNANDEZ, MICHAEL MORTAROTTI, DANDEL ESPINOZA

## Desert Song

Sometimes the personal touch works best. Like quite a few other chamber music presenters across the country, Tucson's **Arizona Friends of Chamber Music** has a vigorous commissioning program. The organization's "Commissioners Circle" was instituted in 1997, and to date has resulted in over 40 premieres. But the program's most extraordinary aspect is its financing strategy: virtually every commission is fully sponsored by an individual audience member.

The tactic befits an organization that is very much a community endeavor. AFCM presents an impressive list of events: a series of evening concerts (seven in 2009–10) featuring established touring ensembles; a three-concert "Piano and Friends" series, spotlighting rising young musicians; and the one-week Tucson Winter Chamber Music Festival, with top artists (this year's artists included the Miró Quartet) in residence. Yet AFCM has no full-time employees; with the exception of a part-time box-office manager, it is entirely a volunteer outfit. All the work of planning, booking and staging the concerts is carried out by AFCM's board.

It wouldn't be possible without the support of an enthusiastic and devoted audience. "We don't treat them like 'the audience out there,' with the board in an ivory tower," says Jean-Paul Bierny, president. "They can come and talk to any of us, and make any kind of suggestions or criticisms. They feel like an integral part of our chamber music society."

That audience involvement translates into money—not just for commissions, but for all of AFCM's activities. The organization doesn't even do any formal fundraising. "We just have a line item on the season-ticket renewal forms for contributions," says Bierny. The tactic pays off: even though concerts cost only \$25 apiece, AFCM operates consistently in the black.

The simplicity of AFCM's operations is certainly reflected in its audience-sponsored commissions. The strategy means no subsidies from government agencies or outside organizations—and no grant-writing. "We contact and contract directly with the composer and the musicians," Bierny says. "We don't have to fill out all the paperwork for outside funding."

For all of its seeming informality, the AFCM's commissioning program is clearly a jewel in its crown. The results are on display on the AFCM website: a page listing the commission links to bios of the composers and streaming audio of the commissioned works. Composers involved have been the likes of Joan Tower, Jennifer Higdon, Lowell Liebermann and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, who contributed a quintet for strings and saxophone. ("I'm Belgian, so I'm interested in the saxophone," Bierny explains.) Zwilich was so excited by the project that she delivered her work a year early—and at nearly twice the commissioned length.

Aside from the marquee names, AFCM has also called on a number of young and lesser-known composers, with an emphasis on those whose works emphasize tonality and melody. "We have put a lot of work into choosing pieces that will be interesting and challenging, but also pleasing and attractive to our audiences," says Bierny. "Not every piece is going to be one of the Razumovsky quartets, and not every sponsor will have his or her name go down into eternity, but a lot of the pieces are very good, and there are a number of masterpieces."

[www.arizonachambermusic.org](http://www.arizonachambermusic.org)



MEMBERS OF THE  
EBÈNE QUARTET,  
WITH PIANIST  
GILLES VONSATTEL,  
IN TUCSON.

## Worldly Wise

The group is made up of a language scholar, a geology/geophysics major, a doctoral candidate in educational studies and a tennis ace. Oh...and they all play string instruments. But the range of interests shown by the **Vinca Quartet's** members points to an understanding of music as part of the world at large—an awareness they bring to all their activities. The quartet has the packed touring schedule of a professional ensemble. But much of its activity goes beyond conventional concertizing toward an effort to place music in a greater context.



Laura Seay,  
Aaron Quiro,  
Jessica Tong, and  
An-Lin Bardin

Look at the quartet's work with Livermore, California's Hertz Foundation—an organization that awards fellowships to top doctoral candidates in science. The foundation holds a twice-yearly retreat for its scientists; this past August, the Vincas were invited to join them to explore parallels between science and music. "Many of them had no idea of what we did for a living," says Jessica Tong, the group's first violinist. But it soon became

clear. The scientists watched the musicians rehearse in order to analyze the myriad decisions and the complex interplay that go into putting together a musical interpretation. One scientist, working on a device to help blind people maneuver without the aid of a seeing-eye dog, used the quartet in an experiment on sound perception, having the musicians (save cellist An-Lin Bardin) move around a room as they played.

But the most conspicuous demonstration of the quartet's outward-looking focus is its "Gorgeous Sounds Residency": a two-week program, held three times a year, in the towns of Hood River, Oregon, and White Salmon, Washington, along the Columbia River. The region ("the windsurfing capital of the world") hosts a wildly diverse population, from technology execs to migrant farm workers, many of whom have never had the chance to hear live chamber music. "When we first approached them, they were excited about the prospect of a quartet—but they thought we meant a *barbershop* quartet!" says Tong.

During each Gorgeous Sounds Residency, the Vincas perform free community chamber concerts, go into area schools for classes and demonstrations, and run workshops for local music teachers. "It's incredible how open people are to chamber music when you're present," says Tong.

"We don't want them to have this experience just two weeks a time," Tong explains. "We're working with local artists and musicians, acting as a catalyst for what we hope will be a bigger and broader project from the community. For us personally, given our backgrounds and our training in other areas, it goes beyond music: it shows how music can complement your entire education." [www.vincaquartet.com](http://www.vincaquartet.com)

# SEQUENCES

The **Daedalus Quartet** announced in late March that founding violinist **Kyu-Young Kim** has left the ensemble to pursue other musical interests. **Ara Gregorian** will take his place and will alternate the position of first violin with **Min-Young Kim**.

Violinist/violist and educator **Barry Shiffman** has been appointed associate dean of the Glenn Gould School and dean of the Young Artists Performance Academy at **The Royal Conservatory** in Toronto. A co-founder of the **St. Lawrence String Quartet** in 1989, Shiffman has served since 2006 as director of music programs at **The Banff Centre** and as executive director of the Banff International String Quartet Competition. He will take up his new position in September but will continue to direct Banff's summer music programs and competition.

**Oberlin Conservatory of Music** received the 2009 National Medal of Arts from President Barack Obama in a White House ceremony on February 25. The medal is the highest award given by the United States government to artists and arts patrons in recognition of the wealth and depth of their creative expressions.

## In Memoriam

- Bernard Coutaz**, founder, Harmonia Mundi recordings
- Herb Ellis**, guitarist, Oscar Peterson Trio, the Soft Winds, Great Guitars
- Philip Langridge**, tenor
- Ariel Ramirez**, composer and pianist
- Oscar Ravina**, violinist, New York Philharmonic; co-founder, the Ravina String Quartet and the Philharmonia Virtuosi of New York
- David Soyer**, cellist, Guarneri String Quartet
- Blanche Thebom**, mezzo-soprano
- Ed Thigpen**, drummer, Oscar Peterson Trio
- Earl Wild**, pianist and composer



## Wrong Bassist

A photo caption on page 29 of "Report from the Conference" (March/April, 2010) misidentified the bassist pictured in the middle of the page. He is **Brian Coughlin**, director of Fireworks, playing at the ensemble's showcase, and *not* Johannes Wiedenmueller.

## Portland String Quartet This Summer

CMA's March/April 2010 Festival Directory may have confused some readers about the Portland String Quartet's two summer offerings. **The Maine Festival of American Music: Its Roots and Traditions**, will be held at Sabbathday Lake, ME, June 23-26, and features the PSQ performing, with pianist Paul Posnak and soprano Christina Astrachan, music of composers from Bloch to Gershwin and more. **The Portland String Quartet Workshop**, open via audition to established ensembles and to individuals over 14 years, takes place July 18–August 1, at St. Joseph's College, in Standish, ME. For more details about the festival and the workshop, go to [www.portlandstringquartet.com](http://www.portlandstringquartet.com).