

WINDS ACROSS THE SEA

Hawaii's Spring Wind Quintet and Norway's Bergen Wind Quintet forge a friendship as spectacular as their scenery

*by Marsha Schweitzer
bassoonist, Spring Wind Quintet*

The sheer cliffs of the north coast of Molokai are said to be the steepest and most inaccessible sea cliffs in the world. Just as imposing, however, are the majestic cliffs along the fjords of Norway's rugged coastline. Despite being half a world apart, both lands are known for breathtaking natural beauty, friendly people, histories and cultures tied to the ocean, and a rich musical heritage.



From these two distant lands has come an unexpected but incredibly fruitful collaboration between two wind quintets: the Spring Wind Quintet of Honolulu, Hawaii, and the Bergen Wind Quintet of Bergen, Norway.

The seeds of this relationship were sown in Aspen, Colorado in 1993, where SWQ clarinetist Jim Moffitt got to know BWQ bassoonist Per Hannevold. When the Bergen Quintet was planning their regular winter residency at the University of Minnesota in 2003-2004, they decided that they wanted to get away from the cold weather for a bit, so Per suggested adding a stop in Hawaii to the schedule.

After a few calls and emails, the BWQ was booked in Honolulu to perform the Gounod Petite Symphonie along with the SWQ on a regularly scheduled concert in January 2004. On the same program, the BWQ performed the Samuel Barber Summer Music. A school concert for the BWQ was also scheduled in Honolulu, but plenty of time remained between musical activities for the group from the chilly North to get a thorough sunburn on the beach!

Both groups are independent, self-run, chamber ensembles, with each musician having a share of "ownership" and management responsibility. Both ensembles have been in existence for many years, and many members have devoted a large part of their professional lives to the wind quintet genre.

In May 2005, it was time for the SWQ to complete the exchange. Armed with proclamations from the Governor of Hawaii and the Mayor of Honolulu, two suitcases full of Hawaiian macadamia nuts and Kona coffee, and unusual (for them) wardrobe items like winter coats and gloves, the SWQ embarked on its first European tour. To break up its long flight, the SWQ stopped on the East Coast and made its New York City debut at Symphony Space.

The SWQ's tour repertoire focused on works written especially for the two groups—"Spring Wind," written for the SWQ by University of Hawaii composer Allen Trubitt; and Quintet #1 by Harald Sæverud, written especially for the BWQ. We performed these works at Siljustøl, the museum home of Sæverud, with two sons of composer in attendance. At Trolldhaugen, the museum home of Edvard Grieg, the SWQ and BWQ joined forces to perform Jean Francaix's "Divertissement" for double quintet. The SWQ performances in Norway also included a sampling of Hawaii's traditional music.

The two quintets are now working on return trips—the Bergen to Honolulu in 2007, and the Spring to Europe in 2007 or 2008. Only Loki and Pele, the parallel Norse god and Hawaiian goddess of fire, know what serendipities await these musicians as their converging musical fires continue to glow.