

Bass Instincts

"I finally made Carnegie Hall—even though it's the basement." The veteran jazz bassist **Ron Carter** may joke about his trio's Zankel Hall gig this past December, but he's dead serious about what it means to get booked by the august classical music presenter. For Carter, jazz and chamber music exist in the same realm—it's just that some classical musicians have trouble seeing it that way. "Jazz and chamber music have never been far apart," says Carter. "If you take the drums away from any jazz band, you have the sound of chamber music in its most complicated form."

Carter's reputation has made him into New York's unofficial consul to the worldwide bass-playing community. "I would always know when a big orchestra was coming to town—Berlin, Amsterdam, London—because one of the players would call me," he says. "And we would talk bass. And we would *play* bass—much to their amazement."

There are differences, of course, between the tasks presented to jazz and classical musicians. "Chamber musicians have a template; they're bound by what has been laid out before them—by that invisible conductor," he says. "The jazz band doesn't have that kind of security: They're more at risk."

One of Carter's current pet projects offers at least a partial bridge between the two realms. His nonet is an unusual combination of instruments—piano, bass, drums, percussion, and (astonishingly) four cellos, with Carter himself on piccolo bass. The result pits Carter's own cool-jazz impro-

visatory style against the lush, almost symphonic backdrop provided by the cellos. "I'm convinced that if a lot of people heard this ensemble, it would make the line between chamber music and jazz disappear," says Carter.

For all of his activity fronting for his own ensembles, Carter hasn't let up on his sideman gigs, continuing a history that stretches back more than forty years, to his work in Miles Davis's classic 1960s quintet. To date, Carter has racked up the astonishing figure of 2,500 albums, playing with such varied figures as Coleman Hawkins, James Brown, Antonio Carlos Jobim, Paul Simon, Lena Horne, and Jessye Norman. "One of my friends asked me why I'm on so many records," says Carter. "The simple answer is 'Good people call me,'—but it's not so simple as that. My determination is to play good. And you can't play good if you aren't playing. Whenever I take the bass out of the case, it's my last chance to get it right." It's a revealing credo: For almost half a century, "getting it right" is what Ron Carter has been doing, time and time again. www.roncarter.net



The Eclectic Company

For **Opus 21**, boundaries exist for one reason only: to be crossed. The Michigan-based group moves easily among genres—contemporary classical, jazz, world music. The common thread is an emphasis on the new: A typical Opus 21 program mixes recent works with brand-new commissions. Five of its eight members are comfortable with jazz improvisation; all are accomplished classical musicians. The unusual deployment of forces—violin and bass, drums and two percussionists, sax, clarinet and piano—provides an opportunity for composers to produce their most out-of-the-box inventions.

It isn't surprising that the ensemble's founder and artistic director, Richard Adams, is himself a composer who embraces eclecticism. Adams has conceived of Opus 21 as a reflection of an ever-widening musical universe. "We're bombarded with all kinds of music that it wasn't so easy to find out about a couple of decades ago," he says. "Musicians and audiences members are all very interested in these different kinds of music. The trick is to program it in ways that make sense."

A recent Opus 21 concert exemplifies the both the care that goes into Opus 21's programs, and the creativity that results. It consisted of commissioned works from seven wildly varied composers, based around a common theme: the music of Motown. The results were as varied as the composers themselves, who ranged from Michael Daugherty to jazz pianist Fred Hersch to Motown bandleader Joe Hunter. But the pieces cohered as a program. "The rhythm and timbre of Motown

were the underlying element that tied these pieces together," says Adams.

Opus 21 tends to commission short works; the idea is to put together small pieces in such a way that the audience is taken for an unexpected ride. "The concerts tend to be energetic and fast-paced," says Adams. "You feel the connection between places. If you had a twenty-minute classical work followed by a twenty-minute improv, the audience wouldn't necessarily be able to do it."

As Adams sees it, the idea of segregating musical performances according to type doesn't reflect the tastes and interests of today's audiences. "We did a survey of our audience, asking what kinds of music they listened to," he reports. "Twenty percent checked 'classical'; 20 percent checked 'jazz.' The rest checked multiple categories, or simply 'other.' That could be anything from country music to rap. We provide repertoire to audiences whose interests lie along those lines." www.opus21.org

American Ensemble

Mighty Young Winds

This June, for the third year in a row, New York University will play host to a group of young woodwind players, gathered for an intensive week of learning, rehearsing, and performing. The institute hosts 25 musicians, and it's anything but a random number: It breaks down into five woodwind quintets, each under the guidance of a member of the **Quintet of the Americas**.

The program was the brainchild of Esther Lamneck, NYU's director of instrumental studies. "I wanted to let woodwind players know that there are performing possibilities and a career possibility—that composers will write for you," she says. She invited oboist Matt Sullivan, an NYU faculty member, to launch the project, along with his four Quintet of the Americas colleagues.

The young people spend their mornings in rehearsal, afternoons are devoted to masterclasses and private lessons, and public concerts occur at the end of the week. "For some of them, it's the first time they've actually worked in a team and put together a difficult work," says Sullivan. "It's quite thrilling to know you're introducing students to these great works."

The institute's focus isn't solely musical: It includes instruction in the business of music-making and forming a career, and advice on how to manage the inevitable conflicts that arise in chamber music groups. The week also features a dose of socializing, including evening gatherings where the young musicians mingle with their mentors. For some, it can be a life-altering experience. Dan Padmos, a clarinetist now in his senior year of high school, entered last year's program unsure about whether he truly wanted to pursue a career in music. One week later, he emerged with a calling. A turning point for Padmos: a party held at Matt Sullivan's apartment, and the insight it offered into the musician's life. "I loved the way everything was set up there," he says. "I thought 'If this is what the musician's life is like, it's definitely appealing.'" www.quintet.org/nyusi.html



SEQUELS

Cellist Jeffrey Zeigler has joined the **Kronos Quartet**. Zeigler is a graduate of the Eastman School of Music and Rice University and was cellist of the Fischhoff Award-winning Corigliano Quartet from 1998–2004. Zeigler replaces Jennifer Culp, who performed with Kronos for six years.

Violinist/composer Cornelius (Neil) DuFallo has joined the New York-based string quartet **Ethel**. A co-founder of the FLUX quartet, DuFallo runs the contemporary music ensemble Ne(x)tnetworks and is also a member of the International Sejong Soloists. Other recent affiliations include the Absolute Ensemble, Ornette Coleman's

Harmelodic Chamber Players, and Butch Morris's New York Skyscraper. DuFallo replaces one of Ethel's founding violinists, Todd Reynolds.

Composer Alan Fletcher has been named president and chief executive officer of the **Aspen Music Festival and School**. He comes to Aspen from the positions of head of the School of Music and professor of music at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he has been since 2001. Previous positions include provost and senior vice president at the New England Conservatory. Mr. Fletcher succeeds Don Roth, who served with the Festival from 2001 to 2005.

A Climate for Music-Making

Think of it as the right place, the right time—and the right music. When **Chamber Music Northwest** started in 1971, its ambitions were modest—presenting a handful of summer concerts in small-scale Portland, Oregon. In the thirty-five years that have followed, Portland's population has doubled, and the city has become a center of high-tech industry. In the meantime, CMNW has become a full-fledged five-week summer festival, with a series of winter concerts added into the mix. The organization runs on an annual budget in excess of a million dollars, and has garnered a multimillion dollar endowment.

"This is for something that started with the idea 'Let's put on a couple of concerts in the summer,'" says David Shifrin, now celebrating his 25th season as CMNW's artistic director. "It didn't come with its own venue, or a mandate, like the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. [Shifrin was CMSLC's artistic director from 1992 to 2004.] It grew along with the city of Portland."

Shifrin sees the specific qualities of Portland as intrinsic to CMNW's success. For one thing, the city's intoxicatingly mild climate has proved a real draw to the musicians who return, summer after summer. ("Fred Sherry says it's almost like a second home," says Shifrin.) And even with its recent growth, Portland is still too small to support a full-time symphony orchestra or opera company, which gives chamber music more prominence there than it might have in a bigger arena. But CMNW's success is also due in part to the Portland's civic culture. Professionals from all over the country have settled there. The city has a thriving art museum, and a number of college campuses. "It's quite a sophisticated small city," says Shifrin. "There's a lot of intellectual and musical curiosity."

This coming summer, festival programming will center around the season's most prominent classical-music birthday boys, Mozart and Shostakovich, plus works of the composers they influenced and those who influenced them. As in previous summers, the concerts will bring together established performers (Ida and Ani Kavafian, Peter Wylie, Kenneth Cooper) with accomplished young musicians. In many cases, musicians who seldom get a chance to collaborate during the winter season will have an opportunity will play together in unexpected groupings.

"It really is a repertory company," says Shifrin. "Chamber Music Northwest was modeled after two organizations—Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and the Marlboro Festival. It's become a conglomeration of both." www.cmnw.org



Pipe Dream

Categorical statements are made to be disproved, but it's probably safe to say that Suzanne Farrin is the only person ever to compose a work for string quartet and bagpipes. Farrin's "The Twisting of the Rope," had its premiere this past November 12 in Amarillo, Texas, featuring the unique combination of the **Harrington String Quartet** and multi-instrumentalist Christopher Layer (inset, right) playing Uilleann pipes.

The piece was the brainchild of Dr. Phillip Periman, an Amarillo music-lover and philanthropist with an abiding love of bagpipes. Periman had mentioned to Richard Weinert, president of Concert Artists Guild, that he would be interested in funding a work combining bagpipes with a string quartet. Weinert all but dismissed the idea until a couple of months later, when Farrin, a member of the music faculty at Yale, chanced to mention her own desire to write for bagpipes. Weiner mentioned the possibility of the commission, and says that Farrin "began to giggle and jump up and down and say 'Could I write it?'"

Giggling was endemic to the process. "When we first heard about the man's interest in commissioning the piece, we giggled—just like everyone else seems to," reports Joanna Mendoza, the Harringtons' violist. But as outlandish as the work seemed at first, it began to make sense as it took shape. The Harringtons had surmised that the stentorian sound of the bagpipes would completely drown out their playing—and hammer the audience's eardrums. But significantly, Uilleann, or Irish, bagpipes are a different instrument from the better-known Scottish variety: smaller and more mellow in tone, and intended to be played indoors.

Farrin compares the "passionate, plaintive quality" of the Uilleann pipes to the spirit of the early blues. Preparing to write the piece, she met with Layer to study the pipes' mechanics and expressive possibilities. She discovered the recordings of Willie Clancy, a legendary bagpiper, and worked on notating his complex rhythm and ornamentation as a way of acclimatizing herself to the instrument. Then came the hard part. "I was faced with the problem: What does this mean to me as a composer?" says Farrin. "I put my transcriptions in another part of the studio, where I actually couldn't see them, and turned my brain on as a composer."

Farrin conceived of the piece as a kind of concerto, with the bagpipe as soloist. She worked to keep textures transparent in a configuration where the usual concerto equation was reversed—here was a solo instrument that could easily overpower its "orchestra." But for all its technical challenges, she reports that "The Twisting of the Rope" was a pleasure to compose. "Writing this piece was returning to that sense when you're first starting as a composer, where your imagination is running wild," she says. "It was the most interesting project I've ever been faced with." www.harrington-stringquartet.com



In Memoriam

In mid-December, Chamber Music America learned of the death of **Scott Reiss**, 54, a co-founder of the Folger Consort and—with multi-instrumental string player Tina Chancey—of **Hesperus**, a CMA member ensemble known for its unique blend of European early music and American folk genres. A clarinetist who became a self-taught recorder virtuoso, Reiss was an ensemble musician championing many musical traditions, from pre-Baroque to Arabic and Andean wind music to American blues. He also played other instruments, including the hammered dulcimer and Irish pennywhistle.

According to Ms. Chancey, who was his wife as well as his musical partner, one of Reiss's major contributions was to change the public's view of the recorder: "The fact that it has a small range—only an octave and a half—and that kids play it as a starter instrument has meant that people often regard it as quaint or cute." Reiss's ability to bend and shape notes and finely adjust pitch "made the recorder into a subtle and serious instrument. His performances were historically informed, but never fussy." Reiss also thought it was important to liberate musicians from the printed page. To that end, he founded (with Mike Seeger) Soundcatcher, the annual West Virginia summer workshop that teaches musicians to play by ear.

A resident of Arlington, Virginia, Scott Reiss was a Pennsylvania native who went to Antioch College in Ohio and studied music at the New England Conservatory of Music and the University of Maryland. His wife reports that he suffered from bipolar disorder (also known as manic-depressive illness) and that he took his own life.

Theodore Roosevelt ("Ted") Williams, 75, for four decades a professor of chemistry at The College of Wooster, died in December. In 1985 Williams established the Wooster Chamber Music Series, now in its 21st season. A non-musician who loved chamber music, he presented and befriended many of the world's leading chamber musicians and ensembles, including the Brentano, Cavani, Colorado, Emerson, Juilliard, Magellan, Mendelssohn, Muir, Pacifica, Talich, St. Lawrence, and Ying string quartets.

"Ted Williams epitomized the one-person force that brings music to communities," said David Finckel, cellist of the Emerson Quartet and co-artistic director of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. "His passing accentuates what I perceive as the coming crisis in presenting—a generation who were educated about music in schools is leaving the scene. Ted was a community presenter who saw how it could be done, what it would take to do it, what it meant—and he just went home and did it."

Dr. Williams was nationally known for his research on human eye tissues, as well as his commitment to making science more accessible to women and minorities. Among the many honors he received were the Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics, and Engineering Mentoring and the Percy L. Julian Award from the National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers.

Derek Bailey, guitarist
Clive Bradley, steel-drum arranger
Constance Keene, pianist
Joe McLellan, critic
Donald Martino, composer
Homer R. Mensch, bassist
Stephen ("Lucky") Mosko, composer; founder of California EAR Unit
Stevenson J. Palfi, maker of jazz documentary films
Karen Poné, pianist; artistic/executive director, Poné Ensemble
Scott Reiss, recorderist, Hesperus
Gyorgy Sandor, pianist
Theodore R. Williams, chemist; founder, Wooster Chamber Music Series