

## What's New, Pussycat?

"When I was in school, new music was Stockhausen," says Burton Beerman. "But it isn't the pariah it once was. New music today can be like a pussycat rubbing up against the audience and saying, 'Love me, love me, love me!'"

Beerman knows whereof he speaks. As director of the **MidAmerican Center for Contemporary Music**, he heads up the Art & Music Festival, a three-day event when Bowling Green State University in Ohio becomes an international hub of new music. It's an intense period of world premieres, many by young composers, along with symposiums, art exhibitions and masterclasses. The 28th annual festival will be held this year on October 18–20.

The MidAmerican Center, part of the College of Musical Arts, serves as Bowling Green's *de facto* doctoral program in contemporary music, along with engaging in archival and promotional activities. But there's no question that the festival is its centerpiece. "One of the nice things about Bowling Green is that it honors new music," says Beerman, who leads the festival and directs the MidAmerican Center. "It provides grants for the people who are going out and playing it—and it provides release time for the director [to organize the festival]. I'm not sure this kind of festival could occur like this anywhere else."

The time commitment required for the festival can hardly be overstated. Its open submissions policy means that Beerman must personally make his way through

more than 300 scores, whittling down the list to the 35 works that will eventually be performed. "Sometimes you have to make decisions quicker than you really want to," says Beerman. "Some works are infantile—you know you aren't going to do them. Then you have to consider things like the length of the works, the resources you need, the things you can put together to make good concerts. We try to have a wide variety of styles. And we try to have the whole world represented—not just one country."

Student musicians and ensembles present much of the music, augmented by guest performers like cellist Madeleine Shapiro, who was featured in the 2006 festival. Many of the young composers make their way to Bowling Green for the festival, turning it into an informal composers' convention. Each year, one prominent composer is a featured guest; the list of past guest composers

includes John Adams, Milton Babbitt, William Bolcom, John Cage, and Joan Tower; in 2007, it will be Chen Yi. Aside from overseeing performances of their works, these composers take part in an audio "living archive," preserving their voices and thoughts on music. (Many of these files are available on the festival's website.)

For all of the confluence of new-music talent, Beerman is adamant about not letting the festival turn into a hermetic, in-crowd event. He is proud of the audiences that the concerts draw—not just from the university, but from the town and beyond. This is largely due to the Center's concentrated outreach program, involving presentations in the university, in local high schools, even in coffeehouses and the Kiwanis Club. For Beerman, there's a simple formula for drumming up interest. "Tell people it's *good!*" he says. "You've got to act like it's the thing to do, and that they belong there."

[www.bgsu.edu/colleges/music/MACCM/festival](http://www.bgsu.edu/colleges/music/MACCM/festival)



BELGIUM'S THELEMA TRIO AT BOWLING GREEN

## A Festival on the Edge

Cocktail music it ain't. Each October, Ann Arbor, MI, becomes home to an assemblage of some of the most innovative improv-based jazz groups around. The annual event's name, "**Edgefest**," suggests the nature of the performances. Whether it's trumpeter Dave Douglas, saxophonist Roscoe Mitchell, the Balkan-influenced Paradise Trio or the Navajo singer Mary Redbone, the four-day festival stretches the limits of jazz and erases the boundaries that separate it from other genres.

One of the more unusual aspects of the festival is its presenter: the Kerrytown Concert House, a performance space that throughout the year hosts everything from classical chamber music to cabaret. Mezzo-soprano Deanna Relyea, looking to establish a music venue in Ann Arbor free from the looming presence of the University of Michigan, fashioned the space in 1984

from an old house in the city's historic Kerrytown district. (The previous owner had wanted to knock down the house to create a parking lot for his abutting office building, only to be thwarted by the city itself.) The result is an intimate music hall of 110 seats with a truly unexpected layout—an L-shaped room, with the stage at its crux.

Edgefest dates from 1997, founded by local jazz aficionado Dave Lynch. After ten years at the helm, he has stepped down, leaving Relyea, executive director of the Concert House, to oversee the festival. "My background is classical—getting to know this music and the artists has been an education for me personally," she says. "And Dave is certainly going to be in the wings."

Edgefest bursts out of the confines of Kerrytown Concert House and into the clubs, cafés and art galleries of the surrounding community. There's even

SWEDISH COMPOSER AND ACCORDIONIST LARS HOLLMER AT EDGEFEST



an Edgefest parade. All these activities help entice audiences who otherwise might find the prospect of avant-garde jazz forbidding. "Some of the traditional jazz fans in town—they're kind of afraid of Edgefest," admits Relyea. "But after they hear some of these performances, they're more willing to try it. It's not smooth jazz—which we don't like anyway. They can *have* their Kenny Gs!" [www.kerrytownconcerthouse.com](http://www.kerrytownconcerthouse.com)

## Social Work

Like so many New York-based musicians, artists, and writers in the late 1980s, Mimi Stern-Wolfe experienced AIDS as a personal calamity. All around her, colleagues and acquaintances, almost all of them young men, were suffering and dying—most notably her friend Eric Benson, a musician and actor who succumbed in 1988. Stern-Wolfe, a pianist and conductor, had already founded **Downtown Music Productions**, dedicated to performing ensemble and music-theater pieces. Her response to the AIDS crisis was the Benson AIDS Series, dedicated to the music of composers with AIDS. The series started in 1990, and has continued annually ever since. This past fall, Downtown Music Productions released *Sudden Sunsets*, a CD featuring works by ten composers who died of the illness.

The release takes its title from a work by Robert Savage for violin, flute, clarinet, cello and piano; two of its movements are included on the CD. Other selections include “Bill” from *Eight Love Poems* by Michael Seyfrit, written for oboe and piano, and a movement from Calvin Hampton’s cantata *Live or Die*, for mezzo-soprano, flute, clarinet, French horn and double bass, along with songs by Robert Chesley, Chris DeBlasio, Lee Gannon, Deolus Husband, Kevin Oldham, Nicholas Schaffner and William Turner.

With Stern-Wolfe at the helm, Downtown Music Productions has always concentrated on music that reflects social issues. Its “Composers of the Holocaust” series started in 1989; other series over the years have been dedicated to antiwar pieces, ecology, and women composers. “I always look to find ways to put my music into projects that are socially derived,” says Stern-Wolfe. “When AIDS came around, it was personal and natural to do [the Benson AIDS Series].”

As the AIDS crisis has changed, so have Stern-Wolfe’s annual concerts. They’re still given on World AIDS Day, December 1. But as new medications have helped HIV-infected gay men in New York City maintain their health, the atmosphere at the concerts has become considerably less emotionally charged than when they started 16 years ago. Those early concerts usually left audiences in tears. Now the response tends to be more objective, and the works stand on their own merits. “The tragic stories are numerous,” says Stern-Wolfe. “But in the meantime, people don’t only want to hear composers who are gay and have been cut down by AIDS—they want to hear good music.”

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



MIMI STERNE-WOLFE CONDUCTS  
LEE GANNON’S “PRICKLY HEAT”  
FOR THE BENSON AIDS SERIES

## Brass Tacks

The fifty brass students who attend the International Brass Quintet Seminar aren’t there for fun and games. Every weekday during the two-week session, held at Boston College, they’re immersed in coaching sessions and masterclasses, with further masterclasses and recitals in the evening. “We do the real thing, all day long. We don’t mess around,” says Seth Orgel, horn player for the **Atlantic Brass Quintet**, which runs the seminar. This year’s program—the quintet’s fourteenth—will be held between July 21 and August 3.

The participants range from high school kids to working freelancers and even an occasional senior citizen, but most are college students. A handful come with pre-formed quintets, but for the most part, they get assigned into groups after an intensive “plug-in” session on the seminar’s first day, yielding a total of ten quintets. The Triton Brass Quintet joins the ABQ as seminar faculty, allowing each daily session to get its own coach.

The seminar’s focus is rigorously classical, steering participants away from the show-biz connotations of some brass quintet performances. “We try not to do too many arrangements, but instead original music for brass quintet,” says Orgel. “We look on a brass quintet as a legitimate chamber ensemble, not a performance group.”

The program demands plenty of physical stamina from the players, but the faculty also tries to teach the students how to pace themselves. “The college kids are music major types, and they’re used to this intense level of work,” says Orgel. “But a lot of the younger players aren’t as physically strong and can’t keep up the five-hour-day thing. We try to teach them to just sing through it, or we work on rhythmic stuff or talk about rehearsal tech-



niques. We are not there to injure any of the students.”

The Atlantic Brass Quintet players find the process of leading the seminar is so rewarding that this year they’re starting a similar, yet shorter, program at Sonoma State University in California (June 10–14). “We’ve been doing this for a lot of years,” says Orgel. “There aren’t a lot of situations that we haven’t seen before. It’s great for us, working from 8 or 9 in the morning to 9 or 10 at night. It’s not like we like to perform, and teaching is [just] okay. We’re really committed to the teaching aspect.”

The quintet’s dedication pays off in the loyalty of the seminar’s participants. Each year’s list includes a sizable contingent of returnees; even players who don’t return are likely to pass the word on to friends. “They learn more in two weeks than in all of their school year,” Orgel says. “At the end, they’re feeling exhausted physically—but exhilarated mentally.”

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

## Breaking New Ground

The **Rockport Chamber Music Festival** has always benefited from a picturesque location, a supportive community and enthusiastic audiences. But if all goes according to schedule, the 25-year-old festival will soon find itself on new ground—literal and figurative. RCMF is in the midst of an ambitious fundraising drive that will culminate this coming fall in the ground-breaking for a new arts center. The new hall, scheduled to open in June 2009, will be the most visible face of the festival's efforts to redefine itself as a musical destination. "My goal is that the name Rockport and the festival become synonymous, like Santa Fe or Spoleto," says David Deveau, RCMF's music director.

The town of Rockport, situated on Cape Ann—the peninsula that stretches north from Boston—has historically been an artists' center. Locals have been the backbone of RCMF's support since it started in

1981—the brainchild of two musicians, David Alpher and Lila Deis, who launched the festival with the support of Paul Sylva, a local businessperson. In recent years, though, visitors have started coming not just from the Boston area, but from farther afield, planning their summer vacations around a visit to the festival—and bringing tourist dollars into the town in the weeks before the peak summer season.

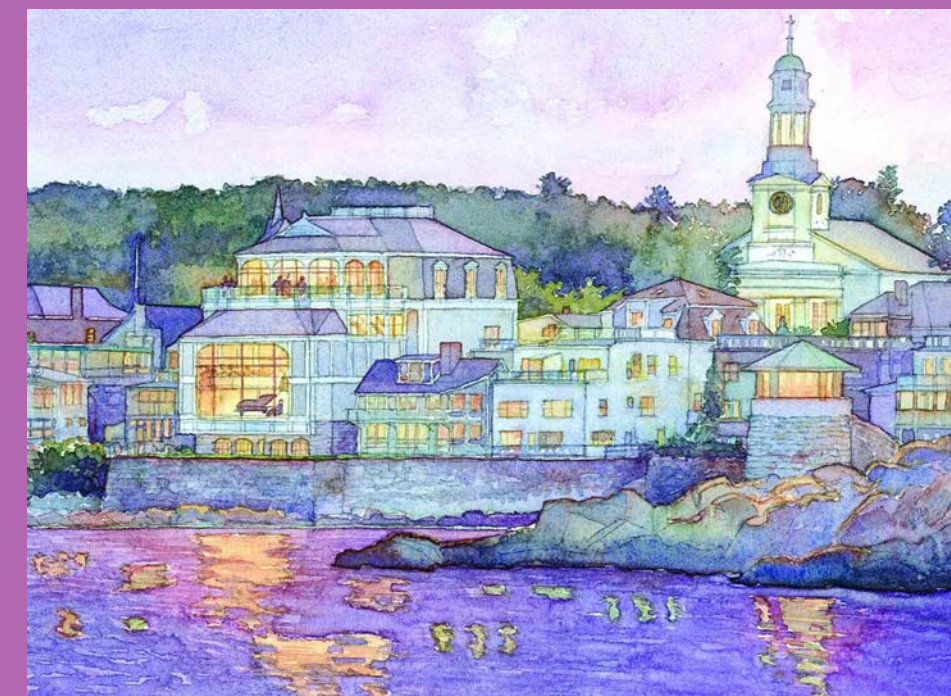
Over the years, the festival has offered celebrity guests like Peter Serkin, Garrick Ohlsson, Richard Stoltzman and Charles Rosen, along with some of the country's top chamber ensembles, in programs that mix standard repertoire with challenging contemporary music and commissions. Starting as a four-concert series during one week in June, over the years it has expanded to 16 concerts over the entire month. But in its new venue, the festival will last the entire summer, adding the months of July and August to its present schedule.

RCMF's main performance venue has always been the Hibbard Gallery in the Rockport Art Association—a charming space, but cramped, lacking in air conditioning and with primitive backstage facilities. "When elder statesmen like Charles Rosen come to perform and you usher them down to the depths of the basement to change, they really look askance," says Deveau. The inherent limitations of the space make the new facility more a necessity than a luxury. It will be built on the site of the largest mercantile building on Rockport's Main Street, featuring a 350-seat hall whose back wall will be a glass window looking out onto Sandy Bay. "Imagine a mini-Sydney Opera House," says Deveau.

The whole ambitious plan would just be a pipe dream if it weren't for the astounding success of RCMF's fundraising efforts. The drive is now three-quarters of the way toward its \$13.5 million goal. That impressive figure is the result of an assiduous set of activities including dinners, presentations, concerts and "cultivation parties." "The trick is to cultivate donors who actually walk the walk," says Deveau.

The fund drive was seeded by two donations totaling \$3 million, both of them anonymous. In other areas, that kind of outlay might carry with it demands for some high-visibility recognition, but not in Rockport. "It's the old New England way—a quiet money sort of thing," says Deveau. "They did not want a lot of glitz attached to their names; they just wanted to see it happen."

The seed money was a key factor in attracting other contributions. "Other people were more inclined to listen than if we just had our hat in hand, but nothing in the coffers," says Deveau. "They saw it as an opportunity to be almost like venture capitalists in classical music." [www.rcmf.org](http://www.rcmf.org)



ARTIST'S RENDERING OF ROCKPORT'S PLANNED ARTS CENTER (LEFT, WITH LARGE WINDOW), SCHEDULED TO OPEN IN 2009

## The Commissioners

Margaret Swinchoski remembers the exact moment that **Palisades Virtuosi**—her New Jersey-based flute/clarinet/piano trio—came into being. "I was driving west on Route 4 and [pianist] Ron [Levy] called me from his cell phone—which is unusual, because he hates cell phones!" Swinchoski relates. Levy's news: Their friend Don Mokrynski, long away as a clarinetist with a touring Broadway show, was back in the tri-state area and available. "Ron said, 'Now that Donnie's home, why don't we start a chamber music group?'"

The three musicians loved the idea of working together, but there was a stumbling block: the paucity of repertoire for their unusual combination of players. The solution—commissioning. Now in its third season of public performances, the trio has included a commissioned work in every one of its concerts. This season alone features premieres by Frank Ezra Levy, Allen Shawn, Eric Ewazen and Dick Hyman. The group also recently released an Albany Records CD, *New*

*American Masters*, consisting of new works by Aaron Grad, Robert Manno, Dan Cooper, Richard Lane and Paul Mack Somers.

Levy is pianist for the Albany Symphony; the position has brought him into contact with a number of composers, a couple of whom he approached with commissions. The word has gotten out, and now the musicians sometimes get approached by composers interested in writing for their unorthodox ensemble. "Most of the composers really seem to have a knowledge of all three instruments, and really write for the *color* of the instruments," says Levy.

When choosing a composer to work with, the group seeks challenging but approachable music. "I got tired of the attitude: 'Look how smart I can write,'" says Swinchoski. "I'm looking for composers whose music I can understand and present to an audience, something we can put our *emotions* into."

"It's important to look for something that has appeal to an audience," Levy adds. "We're trying to build an audience and build a case for living, pertinent music."

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

LEVY, SWINCHOSKI AND MOKRYNSKI



The **Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival** has appointed **Allegra Klein** as executive director. Klein comes to the festival from the New York Youth Symphony, where she served as director of operations for three years. A classically trained violinist, she has also worked for Carnegie Hall, Sony Classical, and the Marlboro Music Festival.

**William Preucil**, concertmaster of the Cleveland Orchestra and distinguished professor of violin at the Cleveland Institute of Music, has joined the Furman University Department of Music as distinguished visiting professor of violin. Preucil, who for seven seasons was the first violinist of the Cleveland Quartet, continues to perform as a member of the Lanier Trio.

Violist **Jodi Levitz** has joined the **Ives Quartet**. Levitz is a former member of I Solisti Veneti and a San Francisco Conservatory of Music faculty member. Scott Woolweaver, Ives Quartet violist since 1999, left to take a faculty position at Williams College.

The string quartet **Ethel** has appointed Michelle Amador director of development for Ethel's Foundation for the Arts.

The Wallace Foundation has named **Daniel J. Windham**, president and chief executive officer of the Cleveland Music School Settlement, as its arts director. Windham, who received his BM and MM from the New England Conservatory of Music, is instrumentalist and vocalist, and has appeared as a baritone with the Boston and Baltimore symphony orchestras and the New York Philharmonic.

Pianist **Phillip Bush** has been named music director of **The Chamber Music Conference and Composers' Forum of the East**. Bush was founding artistic director of MayMusic in Charlotte, North Carolina, a festival that presented chamber and contemporary music, film screenings, and other cross-disciplinary collaborations. He succeeds violinist **Shem Guibbory**, who led the CMC from 1997 to 2006, and who is now co-director of special projects for the **CalArts** Alumni Association.

Tania McGee has been named to **The Sphinx Organization's** newly created position of executive director. McGee has most recently served as the Detroit-based organization's director of education and community affairs and of The Sphinx Competition, for young Black and Latino string players. A graduate of the Leadership Detroit Academy, Ms. McGee received her bachelor's degree in arts management from the De Montfort University, United Kingdom.

## In Memoriam

**Dan Butterfield**, tubist  
**Kenny Davern**, clarinetist  
**Ahmet Ertegun**, music executive  
**Ralph Gomberg**, oboist  
**Galina Ivanovna Ustvolkskaya**, composer  
**Robert McFerrin, Sr.**, baritone  
**Henry Meyer, violinist**; founding member, LaSalle Quartet  
**Anita O'Day**, singer  
**Daniel Pinkham**, composer, conductor, organist