



PETER SERKIN AND THE ORION STRING QUARTET, TISHMAN AUDITORIUM, APRIL 2007

Forever Young

Trivia question: Where did the 12-year-old Peter Serkin make his New York debut? (Hint: The Guarneri, Cleveland, Lenox and

Vermeer string quartets made their first New York appearances in the same venue.)

No, not Carnegie Recital Hall. Not the 92nd Street Y, and certainly not Alice Tully Hall (which isn't old enough). New Yorkers first heard the above-named artists in Tishman Auditorium on West 12th Street, at the institution of higher learning then known as the New School for Social Research. The New School's chamber music series—now **Schneider Concerts**—celebrated its fiftieth

anniversary this past April—and it's still going strong at the original venue.

Frank Salomon, the artist manager who has been associated with the New School series (first as a promoter and later as chief administrator) for 48 of its 50 years, is also a one-man repository of its history. He explains that the organization's prime mover was Eva H. Simons, wife of Hans Simons, the New School's president in the mid-1950s. Mrs. Simons was so taken with Alexander Schneider's conducting of a summer orchestra concert in Washington Square Park that she invited the violinist to create a series at the school's 517-seat auditorium.

At that point in his career, Schneider was not just conducting; he was performing with the Budapest String Quartet and teaching at the Marlboro School and Music Festival in Vermont. The violinist accepted Eva Simons's offer, Frank Salomon recalls, "on the condition that tickets would be so modestly priced that anyone could afford to attend." Simons agreed—and ticket prices were fixed at \$1.00 and remained at that level for a decade. (A half-century later, the fare is still rock bottom: a seven-concert ticket goes for a mere \$75.00.)

The New School's first season, 1957–58, featured Schneider conducting concerti grossi, but—partly for economic reasons—chamber music soon became the permanent focus. And Sasha—as Schneider was known to everyone who worked and studied with him—wanted to present and perform with the many amazing young artists he was meeting and coaching during the summers at Marlboro. So, says Salomon with evident pride, "long before the founding of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the New School became one of the few places in New York to hear mixed chamber music in the kind of venue for which it was composed." And, he adds, "It's still probably the only place a young, unknown ensemble can reliably play to a full house."

With Schneider as music director, New School Concerts came to reflect the Marlboro philosophy in at least one important respect: the music played at Tishman was typically performed by ensembles composed both of seasoned veterans and young talent: The Galimir Quartet did a quintet with the young Emanuel Ax. Sasha and Galimir performed the Schubert C-major Quintet with Michael Tree, Leslie Parnas, and Laurence Lesser. Sasha played Schubert trios with Yo-Yo Ma and Yefim Bronfman.

Julius Levine, Isidore Cohen, Walter Trampler and David Oppenheim performed with an array of then-youngsters, including Richard Goode, Richard Stoltzman, Ruth Laredo, Lee Luvisi, Murray Perahia, Jaime Laredo and Paula Robison.

The long-term viability of the New School's low-budget, high-star-power series is due to several factors: an endowment seeded by music-loving philanthropists such as Alice and Jacob Kaplan; the willingness of the participants to accept modest fees; and, of course, the New School's ongoing generosity in providing a venue, gratis. In addition, Salomon reports, "Sasha never accepted a dime" during his 36 years of labor as music director or as a performer (he played in most of the concerts until 1991, two years before his death). In fact, Sasha never stopped giving—the bulk of his estate went to the Schneider Foundation, which continues to help support the New School's chamber music series and Schneider's other youth-oriented project, the New York String Orchestra Seminar.

Musically, the series mined mainly traditional but also new material. Schneider championed Haydn to such an extent that two seasons in the mid-1980s were devoted entirely to Haydn's chamber works. Performances of *The Seven Last Words of Christ* capped most seasons at around Easter-time. But new music was also part of the picture. Early on, the Fromm Foundation funded a special program on "New Music from Europe" that included works by Berio, Boulez, Messiaen and Castaldi. Principals from the New York Philharmonic played Babbitt. The Lenox Quartet premiered Kirchner's String Quartet No. 2.

In recent years, Salomon and the current administrative director, Rohana Elias-Reyes, have carried on in the Schneider spirit. The concerts, unadvertised, still attract audiences via word-of-mouth, and Tishman Auditorium's seats are always filled. Twenty-first-century ensembles are showcased, and intergenerational collaborations continue. In 2007, Richard Stoltzman, now in the role of veteran, played Beethoven with the members of the Amelia Piano Trio; the Juilliard String Quartet's Samuel Rhodes performed Fauré with the brand-new Trio Cavatina; and pianist Claude Frank joined the young Intrada Wind Quintet for Mozart.

But April 30, 2007—the 50th-anniversary concert—was an all-alumni affair, as the Orion Quartet ended the program with the Brahms F-minor piano quintet—performed with an almost-sixty-year-old Peter Serkin on piano. www.schneiderconcerts.org

ALEXANDER ("SASHA") SCHNEIDER, PLAYER-COACH AND CONDUCTOR



Shock Treatment

Don't be fooled by the makeup of the **Callisto Ensemble**. Yes, the Chicago-based group consists of two violinists (Stefan Hersh and Robert Waters), a violist (Roger Chase) and a cellist (Julian Hersh). But the Callisto is not a string quartet; instead, the four musicians form the core for a concert series that

offers works in deployments ranging from solos to chamber orchestras. Its mission: To offer works of the present day in provocative juxtaposition with masterpieces from the past three centuries of music.

"The idea is to break through lines of demarcation," says Stefan Hersh. It had always rankled Hersh that in Chicago, different musical factions—period musicians, mainstream musicians, new music groups—tended to stick in their own corners. ("The modern players call the period instrument players the 'pre-music crowd,'" he says.) Four years ago, when the Jupiter Trio, featuring Waters and his brother Julian, moved to Chicago, Stefan saw it as an opportunity to bring his idea of a boundary-crossing ensemble into fruition. (The Jupiter's pianist, Aglika Angelova, was part of the original configuration of Callisto.)

Since its second season, the ensemble has concentrated on the work of a living composer, whose works appear in every program it performs. In 2004–05, the featured composer was Augusta Read Thomas; this past season it was Shulamit Ran; and starting next fall, it will be Bernard Rands. The tactic gives both the musicians and their audience a chance to explore the composer's sound world in depth. But perhaps the most striking element of Callisto's programs is that they consistently place contemporary music alongside standbys of the classical repertoire—for instance, a recent concert that matched up works by Ran and John Harbison with the Brahms F-Major Viola Quintet. "We deliberately juxtapose stuff for shock value," says Stefan.

This unusual approach to programming is made possible by the ensemble's economic basis—or lack thereof. All of the players make their livings on other projects; their involvement with the Callisto Ensemble stems purely from love of music. "We aren't beholden to dollars," says Stefan. "We don't have huge audiences, but we have very discerning audiences. We aren't in any way interested in the machinery of getting chamber music to work [economically]."

The lack of the profit motive allows the musicians to concentrate on what's most important—making music. "Unlike any other group I've been involved with, our rehearsals are intense and hardworking, but free of personal tensions," says Stefan Hersh. "There's no demagoguery, no ego stuff. Hackneyed though it may seem—this really is a labor of love." www.callistoensemble.com

THE CALLISTOS: WATERS, STEFAN AND JULIAN HERSH, CHASE



The Road to Enlightenment

Nobody in the **Janaki String Trio** is working from a master plan. The three players—Serena McKinney, violin; Katie Kadarau, viola; and Arnold Choi, cello—hadn't even necessarily planned to become a trio. The two women, friends from New England Conservatory, came to the Colburn School in Los Angeles to pursue graduate studies. "We talked about playing together, but we didn't know what kind of a group to form," says McKinney.

They encountered Choi, an undergraduate, at auditions, and, in McKinney's words, "knew he was going to be *sick!*" Still, the string trio notion didn't immediately click into place: The three started playing together as part of a student piano quartet, but their coaches told them that the richness of their combined sound would make them natural proponents of the string trio repertoire.

Even the group's name (pronounced "YAHN-uh-kye") was a last-minute improvisation, chosen on the eve of the 2005 Coleman Competition. "It was two months after we started together, just playing together for fun," says McKinney. "Now we had to have a name. Katie was online looking at some words, and she liked the way it sounded. It's the name of a princess [in Hindu legend] responsible for bringing thousands of people to enlightenment. It's all so New Age-y! Then we won grand prize—and it was too late to change the name."

As their careers have progressed, the three players have come to appreciate the word's symbolic import. "It means enlightenment and self-realization—a nice concept for any musician, and certainly for a chamber music group," says McKinney. "We've all learned so much about ourselves, chamber music and life. It sounds cheesy but it's true!"

While still at Colburn, the trio is pursuing a busy professional schedule, under the management of Concert Artists Guild. This season they made appearances across the nation, including a New York recital debut at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall, and toured Australia. The Janaki's debut CD has been released by Yarlung Records, and their recording of the Vanhall flute quartets, made with flutist Uwe Grodd, is due out on Naxos. The three musicians use rare 18th-century instruments; the violin and viola

from the Mandell Collection of Southern California, the cello from an anonymous donor.

Along with the recognition come the responsibilities of sustaining a career as chamber musicians. The three young players are learning to cope not just with the intense interpersonal dynamics of working as an ensemble, but with the logistical demands of running an endeavor that's essentially a small business. "We're still kind of going with the flow," says McKinney. "But we're always pleasantly surprised with where it takes us." www.janakistringtrio.com



JANAKI STRING TRIO

Act III F. Scott Fitzgerald got it wrong when he said, “There are no second acts in American life.” In the case of **Monday Evening Concerts**, the venerable Los Angeles new music series, a long and lauded Act II has now given way to yet a *third* act.

It didn’t always look as though the curtain would rise. Founded in 1939, Monday Evening Concerts had been in residence at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) since 1965. But in 2005, the series suffered a double blow: First LACMA announced that it was severing its ties, leaving the concerts without a venue or institutional sponsorship. Weeks later, Dorrance Stalvey, the composer who had led the series through most of the previous four decades, died of lung cancer.

It seemed as though Monday Evening Concerts would never recover from these setbacks. But just before Stalvey’s death, he got LACMA to agree to one more season, which he proceeded to program. “He didn’t live to see the concerts in ’05 through ’06, but at least he was doing the work he loved before he died,” says his widow, Valerie Bernstein Stalvey. Then, a few months after her husband’s death, Valerie gathered together a group of the series’ most ardent supporters. One person who attended was Justin Urcis, then artistic coordinator of the Philharmonic Society of Orange County. Urcis had previously been only an avid member of Monday Evening Concerts’ audience, but soon he found himself (“I either volunteered or was nominated”) artistic director of the series.

Urcis’s first priority: to mount a 2006–07 season, by hook or by crook. “We decided it was imperative not to stop—not to take a year off, then try to get things going again,” he says. “We had to have a season.” His resolve paid off this year in four concerts that took place at REDCAT in Walt Disney Concert Hall and Zipper Concert Hall, including evenings curated by Steven Stucky, Kent Nagano and Esa-Pekka Salonen, and opening with a tribute to Stalvey and premiering his last work, *Stream*.

The rallying of boldface names is impressive, but not unexpected. After all, even before its LACMA days, Monday Evening Concerts had presented the American debut of Pierre Boulez, served as a training ground for the young Michael Tilson Thomas and offered no fewer than 12 premieres by noted Angeleno Igor Stravinsky. Now, in its new, independent configuration, the series harkens back to its grass roots, when concerts were given on the roof of the home of the series’ founder, Peter Yates.

“What happened with LACMA is a curse and a blessing,” says Urcis. “We lost our institutional support, but it’s a liberation of sorts—now anything’s possible! What’s exciting is that we have an opportunity not just to have *x* amount of concerts on Mondays, but to be a force for contemporary and unusual music throughout the city.

“This isn’t just any series,” says Urcis. “We’re continuing an important legacy.”

www.mondayeveningconcerts.org



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Six of One

In the realm of traditional chamber music, there are string quartets and piano trios. For everything else, there’s **Concertante**. Founded in 1995 as a 17-piece string orchestra, the ensemble soon decided it would function better as a chamber music ensemble of six string players, Concertante gave its first chamber music series in 1997 and is now Resident Chamber Music Ensemble of the Whitaker Center for Science and the Arts in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. It has an extensive touring schedule, and gives an annual series at Merkin Hall in New York City. This year Concertante celebrated its tenth season.

The group shrinks down to trios in performance, and invites guest artists to round up its forces to octets and nonets. But at its heart, it’s a string sextet, confronted with the limitations of the existing repertoire. “It’s a challenge to find new things to play once you get past the handful of so-called masterpieces,” says Xiao-Dong Wang, one of Concertante’s violinists. Promoters inevitably request string sextet mainstays—Brahms’s sextets, Tchaikovsky’s *Souvenir de Florence*—but the group always looks for ways of varying the mix. Their explorations recently produced a Kleos Classics CD of two early twentieth-century beauties, the sextets of Korngold and Frank Bridge. “These are two masterpieces of the sextet repertoire that hardly anybody ever plays,” Wang says. “Before we started playing them, we had no idea of how great these pieces were.”

In another effort to expand the string sextet repertoire, the ensemble has embarked on a commissioning series called “One Plus Five.” The group has called upon six composers—Lowell Lieberman, Tigran Mansurian, Gabriela Frank, Shulamit Ran, Richard Danielpour and Kevin Puts—to write pieces, each one showcasing a different Concertante member. The Lieberman and Mansurian pieces had their premieres this past season. Some presenters have even requested that eventually the ensemble form entire programs from the commissioned pieces. “This project will turn out to be something interesting,” says Wang. www.concertante.org

CRAIG SMITH



Burrowing In

The philosopher Isaiah Berlin famously distinguished between the fox, who knows many things, and the hedgehog, who knows one big thing. If these definitions can be applied to musicians, then **Craig Smith** is definitely a hedgehog—and the “one big thing” he knows is Bach. Every Sunday, eight months a year, Smith leads his group, Emmanuel Music, in one of Bach’s cantatas as part of the liturgy at Boston’s Emmanuel Church. The cantata series started in 1967, and has continued uninterrupted ever since.

But Smith’s hedgehog-like activities range beyond the Sunday cantata performances—and beyond Bach. Emmanuel Music’s many years of performances of Handel operas include the epochal production of *Giulio Cesare*, directed by Peter Sellars and featuring the late, great Lorraine Hunt Lieberson (a frequent Emmanuel collaborator) as Sesto. And in its chamber music activities, the organization has distinguished itself by burrowing into a composer’s output. Emmanuel has in the past presented a seven-year Schubert series, a four-year Brahms series and a year of John Harbison’s works. This past season was its fourth devoted to the songs, chamber and instrumental music of Schumann; this fall, Emmanuel embarks on its fifth all-Schumann season.

“A lot of what we do reflects my own taste,” says Smith. “When I get on a composer, I’ve always wanted to know every note he wrote.” In his enthusiasm, Smith carries his audience along with him. “Every time we do a composer, for the first concert we have a good crowd, but by the end, we have really big crowds,” he says. “Our crisis—and it’s not a crisis—is that we almost can’t expand. We fill every seat in a beautiful intimate little hall [the 125-seat church parish hall], and the next choice is [the main sanctuary], which is terribly distant and churchy. You don’t want to do Schumann in a place like that!”

A diverse group of instrumentalists, vocal soloists and choristers have clustered around Emmanuel’s activities, but according to the Smith, they share a common aesthetic. “It comes from Bach,” he says. “The whole Bach apparatus informs everything we do. It’s the most rigorous technical training any musician can have. To wrap their chops around any of these pieces—it changes musicians.”

By working on cantatas, week in and week out, Emmanuel’s instrumentalists also get to learn from singers—an interchange that works both ways. It was notably embodied in Hunt Lieberson, herself a viola player who became a mezzo-soprano. “Lorraine could turn around to the musicians while she was singing and say ‘I’m doing an up-bow,’” says Smith. “She represented the best of what we can do.”

“There aren’t an awful lot of chances for a fine violinist and a fine singer to interact, but Bach cantatas are among them,” Smith continues. “All of our string players are very influenced by singing. The players learn to breathe and the singers learn to articulate.” www.emmanuelmusic.org

SEGUES

Alice Tully Hall, home of **The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center** in New York City, has closed its doors until late 2008, while a multimillion-dollar makeover gives it a new auditorium and a three-story glass lobby. (Other improvements to the West 65th Street side of Lincoln Center include new rehearsal studios for **Juilliard**, a new lobby and marquee for Lincoln Center Theater, and a new theater and screening room for the Film Society.) The Chamber Music Society will move most performances to the Society for Ethical Culture on Central Park West at 64th Street.

The Banff Centre for the Arts has announced the quartets chosen to participate in the 2007 Banff International String Quartet Competition in August. Four quartets from North America were among the ten that made the cut: the **Afiara** (Canada/currently quartet-in-residence at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music as assistants to the Alexander Quartet); **Attaca** (U.S./currently studying at Juilliard with Joel Smirnoff and Samuel Rhodes); **Koryo** (U.S./mentored by members of the Guarneri, Orion, and Miami string quartets), and the **Tokai** (Canada/studied with the Emerson, Ying, Orion, St. Lawrence, and Leipzig quartets). Past winners of the Banff Competition include the St. Lawrence, **Miró**, **Daedalus**, and **Jupiter** string quartets.

Among the recipients of 2007 Guggenheim fellowships in Music Composition are CMA members **Jane Ira Bloom**, New York, NY; **Don Byron**, Boiceville, NY; **Paquito D’Rivera**, North Bergen, NJ; **Tania León**,

Nyack, NY; and **Rudresh K. Mahanthappa**, Brooklyn, NY.

Violinist James Ehnes has been appointed associate artistic director of **Seattle Chamber Music Society**. A 2005 winner of an Avery Fisher Career Grant, Ehnes will assist founding artistic director Toby Saks in selecting artists and repertoire.

Johann Zietsman, CEO of **the International Society for the Performing Arts (ISPA)**, has stepped down to become executive director of the Mesa Arts Center in Mesa, Arizona.

Violinist **Quinton I. Morris** has been appointed director of chamber music and instrumental studies at Seattle University. **The Young Eight**, the string octet he founded at North Carolina School of the Arts in 2002, will be in residence at Seattle University as well.

In Memoriam

Dick Allen, jazz historian
Louis W. Ballard, composer
Alvin Batiste, clarinetist
Danny Barcelona, drummer
Amelia S. Haygood,
 classical recording pioneer
Andrew Hill,
 pianist and composer
Audrey Michaels, classical
 music publicist
Mstislav Rostropovich,
 cellist and conductor
Tony Scott, clarinetist
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Carla White, vocalist

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