

## Ch-ch-ch-changes

The program was the same. So, for the most part, was the personnel. But the quartet was different. In 1989,

the Orion String Quartet made its New York debut at the 92nd Street Y, playing Haydn, Mendelssohn and Bartók. On October 25, to celebrate its 20th season, the quartet returned to the Y with the exact same program—but a radically changed attitude.

“Our feeling as a group is very different after twenty seasons,” said violinist Todd Phillips a few weeks before the concert. (Phillips and his brother Daniel share the Orion’s violin duties.) “Part of it is the familiarity of playing with the same people all this time. But when you come back to these pieces, there’s always a deeper level of what we’re able to communicate.”

As the years have gone by, the purely technical aspects of playing have inevitably become less of a hurdle, allowing the quartet—whose non-Phillips members are violist Steven Tenenbom and cellist Timothy Eddy—to focus more deeply on interpretation. “One is always concerned with making sure that everything is presentable and respectable,” says Phillips. “But the advantage now is that we can take certain things for granted—and dig deeper into what we’re exploring at the time.”

In rehearsal, the Orions probe into the music partly through discussion, and partly through the kind of nonverbal communication that develops when musicians have been working together for nearly two decades. “We joke that our great sophisticated rehearsal technique is to play something twice,” Phillips says. “The first time around we have a lot of ideas about things that could have been



THE ORION STRING QUARTET

better, so we immediately play it again. This is where taking things for granted helps—we don’t have to talk about every single thing. You can talk about things until you’re blue in the face, but if you can’t produce them, you haven’t gotten anywhere.”

Phillips cites an immersion in Beethoven as a key element in the group’s development. (The quartet has played numerous Beethoven cycles and is in the midst of recording the quartets for Koch International Classics.) “Beethoven more than anybody is uncompromisingly devoted to making the most profound musical statements,” he says. “The challenge of trying to realize that, trying to get it in your playing, influences your style. There’s no room for show. It demands every

ounce of your concentration and every ounce of your musical depth. You never feel like you’ve quite gotten it—it always feels like the carrot in front of the horse.”

Beethoven didn’t figure in the 92nd Street Y program, but his influence was nonetheless felt. In her rave *New York Times* review of the concert, Vivien Schweitzer cited the “Beethovenian pathos” of the Orion’s reading of the Mendelssohn Quartet No. 2 in A minor.

“As we keep looking at these pieces, we find different kinds of insights—that might change next week,” says Phillips. “It’s a continuing process, and the concert is sort of a snapshot. We still feel like we’re on a journey.”

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

## The Family Business

What happens when a husband and wife, both musicians, want to play together, but can’t find the repertoire? Simple—they grow their own. That in brief is the history of the Verdehr Trio, the violin-clarinet-piano

ensemble that for over three decades has allowed Walter Verdehr and Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr to combine marriage with music-making.

When Walter (violin) and Elsa (clarinet) first formed the trio with pianist Gary Kirkpatrick in the early ’70s, they were confronted by a dauntingly small supply of music to play—one great piece by Bartók (*Contrasts*) and a handful of 18th- and 19th-century works of dubious authenticity. In its early years, the Verdehr Trio filled in the gaps with transcriptions of works ranging from Mozart four-hand piano sonatas to Tchaikovsky ballet scores. But there was no question that the fare was meager, hardly substantial enough to sustain a thriving ensemble.

The natural solution was to start commissioning. Early on, Jere Hutcheson, a colleague of the Verdehrs’ at Michigan State University, wrote two pieces for the trio. Soon, the trio got support for its commissions from the university, and eventually the Library of Congress. Its first works from “outside” were by Karl Husa and Leslie Bassett; in the years since, the trio has commissioned pieces from some of the most celebrated composers of recent decades, ranging from David Diamond to Bright Sheng, from Gunther Schuller to Augusta Read Thomas, from Ned Rorem to Jennifer Higdon.

Aside from its prestige, the list of commissions is notable for its eclecticism. “I’ve felt from the beginning that we should make sure there’s a wide variety of styles involved,” says Walter Verdehr. “There are so many fashions in music. Something’s that popular today may not have been popular twenty or thirty years ago. So we’ve commissioned different styles of interesting music, from the avant-garde to the opposite.”

Three decades after its first commission, the trio—which now includes Silvia Roederer on piano—sits atop a repertoire of some 200 works, predominantly of its own making. The ensemble has been documenting this achievement in a series of CDs on Crystal Records titled that now numbers 17 releases. It has also embarked on a related DVD project that mixes videos of performances with composer interviews; a recent

release presents Peter Schickele interviewing Libby Larsen, Gian Carlo Menotti and Joan Tower.

“We do feel a sense of history,” says Verdehr. “Wouldn’t it have been wonderful to have a recording of Beethoven’s works by the groups that first played them? We take it as our job to do these works in the composer’s sense, and capture the character of the piece.”

Not only has the Verdehrs’ repertoire been picked up by chamber collectives like Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, but its example has established the clarinet-violin-piano trio as an ensemble configuration. Groups like the University of Montana’s Sapphire Trio and the Prima Trio from Oberlin—grand prize winner of the 2007 Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition—have sprung up in emulation of the Verdehr Trio.

“When we started the trio, we thought ‘Wouldn’t it be great to start a repertoire—to make a literature like the string quartet or piano trio?’” says Verdehr. “It has turned out to be our life’s work.”

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



THE VERDEHR TRIO: ELSA LUDWIG-VERDEHR, WALTER VERDEHR, AND SILVIA ROEDERER

## American Ensemble

**Partners** Perhaps the collaboration was inevitable. Robert Dick has worked throughout his career to expand the possibilities of flute playing; his invention of the “Glissando Headjoint” brings the “whammy bar” effects of an electric guitar to the flute. Ursel Schlicht melds a formidable pianistic technique with a dedication to experimentation and pitch bending, using a range of glass instruments placed inside the piano’s lower strings to create new, unexpected harmonics. The two have been working together for the past four years, creating music that is complex, sometimes sensuous, sometimes astringent and always intriguing. “We have a virtually telepathic musical partnership,” says Dick. (Their partnership has its personal aspect, as well: The two musicians live together in Brooklyn and have an infant child.)

“We complement each other very well,” says Schlicht. “We like to use textures and elements that are not like the straight-ahead classical or jazz vocabulary. We both like to strive for new things.”

As in any successful teaming, the process has been enlightening for both partners. “We’ve taught each other a lot about clarity of structure,” says Dick. I think Ursel has taught me more about the harmonic implications of various modes, and I’ve taught her more about making a vivid coloristic and dynamic landscape.”

The results of their collaboration can be heard on their recent CD *Photosphere*, recorded at a live concert in Germany and released through Nemu Records, a musician’s cooperative label. The two trade off composer’s credits for the five cuts on the album,



ROBERT DICK AND  
URSEL SCHLICHT

but the actual creation of the duo’s music is a little more complicated than those attributions might imply. “The newer material was conceptualized for the sonic possibilities of this particular configuration,” says Schlicht. “There are things that I could not have written for any other project.”

The duo’s music mixes composed and improvised elements. But Dick points out that even the composed music often bears scant resemblance to traditional notation: The score for his piece “Tendrils” is a “structural road map” for performance, with notations indicating pulses, ascents and descents rather than specific pitch values—“more like an outline for a talk,” he notes, than a piece of sheet music.

“Every piece of music is a story about something, or some things,” says Dick. “And whatever is best to tell the story is what we use.”



## Nature Boy

When Jovino Santos Neto was a student at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and later at McGill University, his central focus wasn’t music: It was biology. He had studied classical piano since the age of 12 and, as an adult, turned his attention to jazz. Nonetheless, he says, “I was determined to be a scientist, with music a strong hobby.”

“Things have turned around,” Santos Neto adds, “and now biology’s a strong hobby.” Hermeto Pascoal helped him make the transition. Santos Neto worked with the Brazilian composer/performer’s band throughout the first part of

his career, from 1977 to 1992, and found that making music didn’t necessarily rule out a love of the natural world. “Hermeto Pascoal always incorporated the concepts and also the sounds of nature into his music,” Santos Neto says. “You can be in the middle of New York City and be close to nature. It isn’t only about an idyllic Thoreau experience.”

During his years with Pascoal’s band, Santos Neto lived in his native Rio de Janeiro, but he visited Seattle in 1990 and made it his home when he decided to strike out on his own two years later. “It’s funny, but Seattle reminds me of Rio,” he says. “It has mountains, a lot of green, water. If you drive into the mountains outside of Rio, you’re already in a place with cool weather that looks a lot like Seattle.”

The Spartan performance and rehearsal schedule of Pascoal’s band instilled habits that served Santos Neto well in his freelance

years, when he had to impose discipline from within. Within a month of arriving in Seattle, he had found some of the musicians who are now his partners in his jazz quartet and quintet. In the years since, he has composed, performed and toured; released six albums—two of them Latin Grammy nominees—and taught piano, composition and jazz ensemble at Cornish College of the Arts. “I use the situation of having an ensemble or a class as an opportunity to compose music on the spot,” Santos Neto says. “It plants new seeds and makes them grow.”

His interest in biology has continued throughout his career; just recently, he has become an avid mushroom hunter, seeking out different species and studying which ones are edible. “They were never separate paths,” Santos Neto says. “Music is a part of nature.” [www.jovisan.net](http://www.jovisan.net)

## SEQUENCES

Cellist **Laura Sewell** has joined the St. Paul-based **Artaria String Quartet**. Sewell, founding cellist of the Lark Quartet, appears regularly with the Chamber Music Society of Minnesota and chairs Chamber Music America’s board of directors.

*Musical America* has named **Chanticleer** ensemble of the year. The San Francisco-based male classical vocal ensemble is now in its thirtieth season.

**Leonard Matczynski** is the new artistic/executive director of **Apple Hill Center for Chamber Music** in New Hampshire. A violist with a thirty-year career in the performing arts, he was most recently the administrative director of **Emmanuel Music** in Boston.

**The Chamber Music Society of Detroit** announced that the winner of the **Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson International Trio Award** is the ATOS Trio. Formed in 2003, the trio—Thomas Hoppe, piano; Annette von Hehn, violin; and Stefan Heinemeyer, cello—is based in Berlin.

**Bard College Conservatory**, in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, has opened a preparatory division, which includes both individual instruction and chamber music coaching, for ages 5–18.

The international arts service organization **CEC ArtsLink** has appointed Fritzie Brown as its executive director, succeeding Michael Brainard.

**David Baile** was named CEO of the International Society for the Performing Arts in October 2007. Baile, who served for six years as general manager of Opera Atelier in Toronto, succeeds Johann Zietsman.

L-R: OSKAR ESPINA RUIZ; THE STUDIO AT TREETOPS;  
THE SHANGHAI QUARTET



## No More Sad Songs

Libby Holman had a right to sing the blues. The bisexual Broadway torch singer was indicted in the 1932 murder of her husband, tobacco heir Zachary Smith Reynolds, who died mysteriously of a gunshot wound after a marital argument. The charges were dismissed, but Holman never shook off the ensuing notoriety. She endured further tragedy years later when her 17-year-old son died in a climbing accident. If she found any calm during her tumultuous life, it was probably at Treetops, her idyllic estate straddling the towns of Stamford and Greenwich, Connecticut.

Treetops has passed through various hands since Holman's death in 1971 and has lost 94 of its 111 acres. But a Georgian mansion on a 17-acre estate remains. Donald Brownstein, a hedge-fund manager, and his wife, harpist Lisa Tannebaum, bought Treetops in 2003, and soon decided that they wanted to share it with the public—especially the studio that Holman built for her third husband, artist Louis Shanker, which the new owners saw as an ideal venue for intimate concerts. Tannebaum brought in a friend from her Purchase Conservatory days, clarinetist Oskar Espina Ruiz, who took the idea and ran with it. The result is **Treetops Chamber Music Society**, now in its second season of concerts and outreach programs.

Aside from established artists like the Shanghai Quartet and a quintet from the Met Orchestra, Treetops offers the pleasure of nature. Holman had loved flowers, and she and her gardener planted thousands of daffodils along Treetops' paths. These still bloom every spring, providing a setting for the Daffodil Walk, an annual fundraiser. An outreach program, "Music and Nature at Treetops," gives schoolchildren an hour each of a music class and a nature walk. The studio itself, nestled amidst the trees and seating just 80 people, provides audiences close contact with both the musicians and the natural setting outside.

"We play the nature card as much as we can," says Espina Ruiz. "There are fantastic concerts in New York City. We bring in as many great artists as possible, but we can't compete with Carnegie Hall or Lincoln Center. We have to offer something unique." Starting a chamber music series, essentially from scratch, has not been easy, but with strong word of mouth, and support from area corporations and individual donors, Treetops has managed to stay buoyant. The concerts are selling out; and Espina Ruiz envisions expanded activities, such as commissions and art exhibits, in the future. "We may turn out to be one organization with many series," he says. "It's a lot of work, a lot of risks, and some huge sacrifices. There's a lot on the line—but we're going for it."

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

## In Memoriam

**Herbert Barrett**, publicist and artist manager; founder, chair, and former president, Herbert Barrett Management

**Arnold Broido**, music publisher; past president, MPA

**Sophie Feuermann Brown**, pianist

**Margaret Carson**, classical music publicist

**Gerald Chamberlain**, trombonist, New York Philomusica, Hora Decima Brass Ensemble, Ten Wheel Drive

**Sharon Fay Gewirtz**, violinist, New England String Ensemble, Atlantic String Quartet

**Albert Goltzer**, oboist, New York Philharmonic

**Jerry Hanley**, tenor

**Craig Smith**, pianist, conductor; founder, Emmanuel Music

**Diana Barker Smith**, pianist, the Guarneri Duo

## Remembering Albert Fuller

by Daniel Stepner

As co-founder of the Aston Magna Festival and the Foundation and Academies that grew from it, Albert Fuller did more, perhaps, than any other American to further the cause of early music. His recent passing will be noted and mourned by hundreds of musicians and thousands of music

lovers who benefited by his loving advocacy of Baroque and early classical music. Albert was the convivial godfather to a generation of musicians who took a historical approach to their instruments or to their vocal techniques. He was a harpsichordist and fortepianist, but had an influence far beyond the practitioners of these instruments. He coached players and singers at Juilliard for years and recruited many of his students there for Aston Magna. He also coached young musicians who were not specialists and was able to infuse a love of early music to those who might otherwise have ignored it because of then-current tastes. Through his work with Aston Magna and later with Helicon, he did more than most to bring "early music" into the mainstream in this country. Albert had an enthusiastic curiosity about the total culture of the music of earlier times. His interest in the art, the literature and the cuisine of earlier times was something he passionately shared with his colleagues and students. His efforts to fund the Brandenburg Concerti recording project was a hard-fought battle that resulted in a first American recording of these masterworks on period instruments. He gathered the best musicians he knew around him and shared the responsibilities generously. I remember well his masterful reading of the Bach's famous cadenza of the Fifth Concerto. Albert created a standard of musical excellence, but also virtually institutionalized his zeal for seeing the larger picture. His presence among those of us who knew and worked with him will be missed.

*Daniel Stepner is the artistic director of the Aston Magna Festival and a violinist in the Lydian String Quartet. This appreciation first appeared in the New York Times. For more tributes to Albert Fuller, see <http://albertfuller.blogspot.com>.*



## Erratum: The Chesapeake Competition

In December 2007 issue, *Chamber Music* wrongly identified a photo as The David Trio, winner of the 2006 Chesapeake Chamber Music Competition. In fact, the photograph so captioned was the Manhattan Trio, a finalist in the same competition.

The David Trio—Daniele Pascoletti, violin, Claudio Trovajoli, piano, and Giovanni Gnocchi, cello—is pictured at left. We apologize to the Chesapeake Competition and the trios for the error.—Ed.