

American Ensemble

Range Rovers

Barry Socher got to the FedEx office just in time. He was mailing a freshly made recording of Kurt Weill's "Youkali Tango" to director Fernando Trueba, who was planning to use it in his new film, *El baile de la victoria*. The violinist and his colleagues in the **Armadillo String Quartet** had first recorded the song for a 1985 Weill tribute album, *Lost in the Stars*, and in 1993, Pedro Almodóvar had used the performance in his film *Kika*. Now Trueba wanted to make his own use of the song, but needed cuts so that it would correspond to the timing of a scene. So the quartet headed to a recording studio and did the job, shipping the music off to the film's location in Chile just before FedEx's 5:00 P.M. cutoff.

The serendipitous, impromptu approach to music-making typifies the 28-year-old, Los Angeles-based quartet. The Armadillos manage themselves, do their own publicity and website, and set up their own concerts. A guiding inspiration for their endeavors is Peter Schickele, a.k.a. P.D.Q. Bach. The quartet gives an annual "Music by Peter Schickele" concert and plays on the recent P.D.Q. Bach release *The Jekyll & Hyde Tour*. Even in their non-Schickele activities, the group makes its own forays into similar screwball territory. Violinist Socher is an arranger who thinks nothing of recasting Sibelius's *Finlandia* as a tango. For their annual "DilloWeen" concerts, the Armadillos perform in a private home for an invited audience of friends and admirers, playing works of P.D.Q. Bach and their own zany repertoire in Halloween costumes.

It isn't all fun-and-games, however. The ensemble also plays standard repertoire and once performed all the Haydn quartets in a day-and-a-half-long marathon. The musicians are considering tackling that project once more, 25 years later—but this time spread over a week. ("We're 25 years older!" Socher explains.)

"We're a group that brings an at-times-outrageous sense of fun and play to our music," says Socher. "But we've got a seriousness that goes deeper than a conventional group that does everything seriously—because of the contrast in our work and the range of feelings." (www.armadillostringquartet.com)



THE ARMADILLO STRING QUARTET—
VIOLINIST STEVE SCHARF, CELLIST
ARMEN KSAJIKIAN, VIOLINIST BARRY SOCHER
AND VIOLIST RAY TISCHER

Bach and Beyond

The Baroque is only a part of it. Elaine Comparone has dedicated her career to exploring the possibilities of the harpsichord, both in the works of Bach's time and in later music. Her organization **Harpsichord Unlimited**, founded in 1978, not only promotes the instrument in Baroque and early classical music, but it has commissioned works for harpsichord and chamber forces from a range of contemporary composers, including Donald Hagar, David McDonald, Hanna Levy, William Foster McDaniel and the late José Bernardo.

The task of performing these pieces falls to Comparone's New York City-based modern-instrument ensemble, The Queen's Chamber Band. The group takes its name from an ensemble founded by Johann Christian Bach in London in 1762, and often juxtaposes its contemporary repertoire with works from the 18th century. Still, in working with contemporary composers, Comparone emphatically instructs them to avoid pastiche. "I don't want pseudo-Baroque pieces," she says. Instead, she looks for composers who can explore the piquant timbre of the harpsichord in a contemporary context.

Arguably even more unusual is the use of harpsichord in the works of Haydn, Mozart and early Beethoven, which Comparone performs with the Queen's Chamber Trio, featuring violinist Robert Zubrycki and cellist Peter Seidenberg. Historically informed performances of these composers usually use the pianoforte, but Comparone argues that musicians in the classical period were just as likely to use the harpsichord. "Piano trio' is a mistranslation," she says. "It's 'klavier,' which just means 'keyboard.' It was a transitional period—do you think everybody took their harpsichords and chucked them? No!"

In all her activities, Comparone strives to present the harpsichord as "a living, contemporary instrument." In her words: "We are not in the museum business of preservation. Since performance is a living art, we must use our modern but educated sensibilities to guide us." (www.harpsichord.org)



House Music

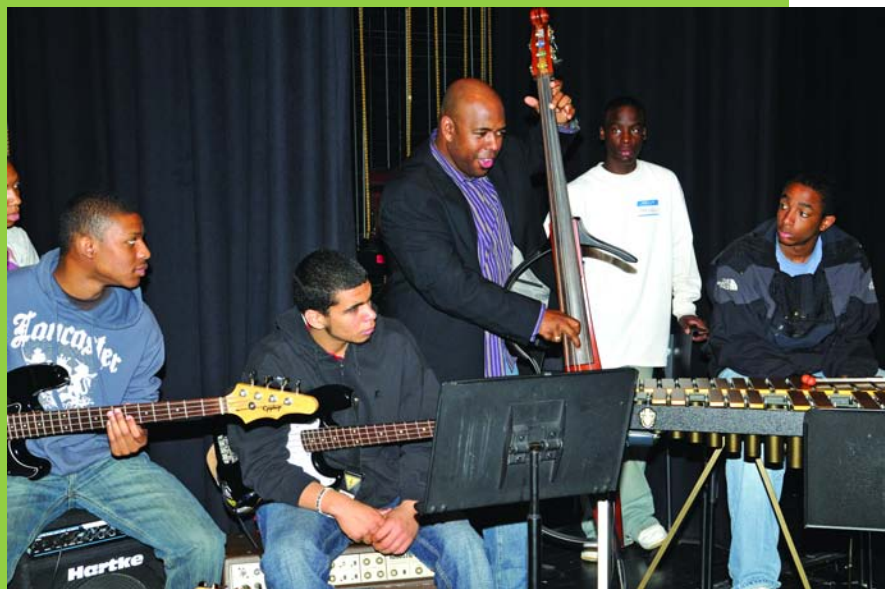
The concept came to Melissa Walker in 1999, when WBGO radio in Newark, New Jersey, asked her to run a workshop for kids in the city's schools. It was the jazz vocalist's first teaching experience and she was nervous about how to approach it. Then she hit on a tactic: "I wanted to talk about jazz as a house," she says. "That house exists in a neighborhood and a community. It has a structure; it's got furniture." She conducted a program, likening drums to the house's foundation, the piano to its color and texture and the singers and other instrumentalists to its residents.

In the years since, Walker has proceeded to move into that house. The Newark session grew into a series of multimedia workshops. Then in 2002, backed by a grant from the Prudential Foundation, Walker formalized her efforts with the founding of **Jazz House Kids**. The organization spent its first few years as a seat-of-the-pants operation, managed from Walker's home office in suburban Montclair. But a couple of years ago, Walker decided to expand JHK's scope. "I convened my board and told them 'It's either got to grow or go,'" she says. "It had gotten too big for me to manage, but it was too small to become something else."

The result was an adolescent growth spurt for the organization. JHK now offers residency programs, professional workshops and outreach concerts along with its school workshops. It has enlisted the services of an impressive range of professional jazz musicians: participants have included her husband, bassist Christian McBride, his colleague Pat Matheny, the guitarist,

and saxophonist David Sanborn. And now Walker now has support for her efforts, including a curriculum director, a part-time administrative assistant, a grant-writer and a publicist. "[Jazz House Kids] used to be me and an idea," she says. "Now it's me and an idea—and a little something!"

Education remains the central focus.



BASSIST CHRISTIAN MCBRIDE WORKS WITH STUDENTS AT NEWARK, NJ'S ARTS HIGH.

The concept is to bring jazz to a wide range of students, not just those who are musically gifted. "If the kid can't swim across the pool, have them swim halfway, because you know they're going to get there," says Walker.

The result isn't just a development of the students' musical skills, but of their minds. Especially for kids who might be struggling academically, the small successes they achieve in the the Jazz House Kids program can provide a welcome shot of encouragement.

"I can't solve the energy crisis or AIDS," says Walker. "But I *can* help people in terms of music." www.jazzhousekids.org

Sunday Best

When Matthew Semler was growing up in Spain, 4 P.M. Sunday was a special hour—a time for relaxed celebration. “Spain was always so good at finding a way to stretch a Sunday afternoon, in a way that possibly Monday might not ever come,” says Semler, who was raised in Barcelona by American parents. “It was usually something that would happen around four o’clock after a traditional Spanish lunch—before the anxiety of the week to come would start to come in.”

Semler is now replicating that tradition in New York City. He’s the founder and director of RogerSmithArts, a program that uses the Roger Smith Hotel, a 130-room midtown hostelry, as the locus of a range of cultural events—readings, lectures, jazz performances, film screenings, art exhibitions. (It’s the only hotel in the city with its own gallery.)

This past year, RogerSmithArts has launched a new endeavor: biweekly Sunday afternoon chamber-music concerts in the hotel’s Penthouse Salon, a 45-seat room with a vaulted ceiling. According to hotel legend, an impoverished Buckminster Fuller slept on the floor here in the Thirties, and the ceiling inspired his geodesic dome. Now the space serves as the setting for two alternating monthly series of concerts—a classical guitar series and a string quartet series featuring the iO Quartet, currently the Billy Joel Graduate Quartet in Residence at SUNY Purchase.

Each concert includes discussions framing the music and making it accessible. “When I saw Jordi Savalle at the [Metropolitan Museum], their program notes gave you a picture of how the viola da gamba traveled through history—but that whole world wouldn’t have been there if I hadn’t read the notes,” says Semler. “The discussions give the audience something to think about when they’re listening to the concert itself.”

The hour, the format and the intimate space all lend an informal, relaxed—almost Spanish—air to the concerts. “What we’re going after,” says Semler, “is something between an oasis and a brain tickler.”

<http://www.rogersmithnews.com/hotel/video/chambermusic1.htm>



THE IO QUARTET PERFORMING IN A GALLERY OF THE ROGER SMITH HOTEL

American Ensemble

SOTTO VOCE'S MARK CARLSON, MIKE FORBES, NAT MCINTOSH,
AND DEMONDRAE THURMAN



With Due Respect

Is the tuba the Rodney Dangerfield of music? That's certainly how tubist Michael Forbes sees it: he feels the instrument gets no respect. "In the *Star Wars* movies, John Williams gives the trumpet to the heroic characters and the tuba to Jabba the Hut and Jar Jar Binks," Forbes says. "In commercials, they use the tuba when a kid gets jello on his face. And the tuba-playing in those commercials is rather suspect, which doesn't help our cause."

The **Sotto Voce Quartet** is, in part, an effort to right the balance. Forbes and Demondrae Thurman founded the group in 1995 with the aim of creating a true chamber ensemble, rather than just a novelty act. With two euphoniums (Thurman and Mark Carlson), a bass tuba (Nat McIntosh) and a contra-bass tuba (Forbes), Sotto Voce is configured as a low-brass equivalent of violin/violin/cello/bass disposition of the string quartet. The group grew out of a workshop at the University of Wisconsin School of Music run by John Stevens, a tuba professor who would arrange classic works to demonstrate the tuba's pos-

sibilities. "We never get to play melody!" says Forbes. "Now we had the opportunity play melody and harmony, one to a part, much like string players." The musicians have since paid tribute to their mentor by recording *Viva Voce*, a CD of Stevens's quartets.

All four musicians have outside engagements and teaching positions that have flung them far apart—Atlanta, Dallas, Alabama, Nebraska. But they coordinate their schedules to arrange a tour every month or two. And they all convene each summer for a tuba quartet symposium. The event not only allows them to work with younger quartets from across the world, but also gives them a chance to work on upcoming repertoire.

The quartet's repertoire is eclectic, ranging from arrangements of Elizabethan consort music to commissions. But no matter what work is at hand, the group adheres to the slogan "High art for low brass," seeking to present the tuba's entire expressive range. "The tuba is a slow and lumbering instrument that can play light and lyrical, like all those other instruments," says Forbes. www.tubaquartet.com

Ralph Evans, Efim Boico, and Wolfgang Laufer, of the **Fine Arts Quartet**, have announced that **Chauncey Patterson** has joined them as interim violist, replacing Yuri Gandelsman, who recently retired from the ensemble. Patterson is a former member of the Miami String Quartet.

George R. Steel has been appointed general director of the Dallas Opera. For the last 11 years, Steel was executive director of the **Miller Theatre** at Columbia University in New York City.

Clarinetist **David Shifrin** has assumed a full-time professorship at Yale School of Music, concentrating on chamber music. He will serve as artistic director of the Chamber Music Society at Yale and direct the school's concert series at Carnegie Hall. Shifrin remains artistic director of Chamber Music Northwest.

The **Vega String Quartet**, in residence at Atlanta's Emory University, has announced that violinist **Fia Durrett** has joined the group as its new first violinist. Durrett is music director of Fringe, in Atlanta. The Vega's other members are violinist **Jessica Wu**, violist **Yinzi Kong**, and cellist **Guang Wang**. **Blanka Bednarz**, the group's previous first violinist, has returned to Dickinson College as assistant professor of violin and viola.

Blake Espy, associate concertmaster of the Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra and a frequent performer with the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, has replaced **George Anthony Figueroa** as the second violinist of **La Catrina String Quartet**, joining **Daniel Albelo-Vega**, violin; **Jorge Martínez**, viola; and **Alan Daowz**, cello. The quartet is currently in residence with the Western Piedmont Symphony and the Chamber Music Festival of San Miguel de Allende, Mexico.

Suzanne Rousso has been appointed artistic director of the North Carolina-based **Mallarmé Chamber Players**, succeeding founding artistic director Anna Wilson. Rousso, a violist by training, was most recently the Portland (Maine) Symphony's director of operations and education and previously served as the North Carolina Symphony's education director.

Alfred J. Guillaume, Jr., vice chancellor for academic affairs at Indiana University South Bend, has assumed the presidency of the **Fischoff National Chamber Music Association**.

As announced in the last issue of *Chamber Music*, the **Mendelssohn Quartet** plans to disband at the end of 2009. Except for cellist Marcy Rosen, who has recently joined the **Lionsgate Trio**, the other ensemble members have no plans to join new ensembles. Violinist **Nicholas Mann** remains chair of the strings department at Manhattan School of Music and on the Juilliard faculty, and will continue performing with his father, violinist Robert Mann. **Miriam Fried**, chair of the piano and strings faculty at **Steans Institute**, will perform as a violin soloist and with her pianist son, Jonathan Biss. Violist **Daniel Panner** will continue to teach at Juilliard and Mannes and comments "I would love to play in a quartet again if the stars align the right way."

In Memoriam

Robert Abramson, director,
Robert Abramson Dalcroze Institute;
faculty, The Juilliard School

William T. Appling, choral conductor,
pianist, teacher

Robert Bass, choral director, Collegiate
Chorale

Joe Beck, guitarist

Hiram Bullock, guitarist

Donald Erb, composer; Cleveland Institute
of Music

Roy Farmer, co-founder, Shawnee Press;
past president, National Association of
Music Publishers; past director, ASCAP

Ralph Hollander, violinist, composer,
inventor of the DAMPIT

Shoghery Markanian, pianist; faculty,
Diller-Quaile School

Johnny Moore, trumpeter, the Skatalites

LeRoi Moore, saxophonist; arranger,
the Dave Matthews Band

Nicola Rescigno, conductor; co-founder,
Dallas Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago

Alexander Slobodyanik, pianist

Géo Voumard, pianist; co-founder,
Montreux Jazz Festival

Lee Young, drummer, jazz producer

Patricia Zander, pianist; faculty,
New England Conservatory;
past coordinator of chamber music,
Round Top Festival

ADDITIONS TO THE 2009 MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY

A technical problem in data entry caused the following members to be omitted from the 2009 directory. Here, with apologies, are those who should have been listed.

PUBLISHER/ DISTRIBUTOR

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ENSEMBLES

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MINNESOTA

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The Aurora Brass Quintet was formed in February 1993 as a vehicle to explore brass chamber music. The quintet is committed to the advancement of brass chamber music through performances of Renaissance and Baroque, 19th- and 20th-century music for brass, as well as contemporary works and new commissions. The quintet is ensemble-in-residence at the Episcopal Cathedral of Saint Mark in Minneapolis.

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PROFESSIONAL MUSICIANS

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Years Performing: 30
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pamelajbus@aol.com

Ms. Bublitz-Snider is an internationally acclaimed chamber musician and a soloist who has appeared with the BBC Symphony, the Bernkastel Kammer-symphonie, the Symphonie de Bordeaux d'Acquitaine, among many others. She has also appeared as a recitalist and chamber musician around the globe. Her appearances as both violinist and violist on the WFMT Chicago Fine Arts Radio "Live From Studio One" series have received international acclaim.

NEW YORK

Bonnie Hampton, Cello
23 W. 73rd St., Apt. 1108
New York, NY 10023
Years Performing: 30
(212) 721-1460
bhampton@juilliard.edu

Cellist Bonnie Hampton performs solo, chamber and concerti repertoire and regularly premieres new and commissioned works. She was

formerly on the faculty at San Francisco Conservatory and has served Chamber Music America as board president. Bonnie joined the Juilliard faculty in September 2003.

Mark A. Lopeman
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Theodore Wiprud, Composer
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Secondary Instrument: Piano
(718) 832-2560
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www.theodrewiprud.com

Theodore Wiprud's works make a lasting impact on performers and audiences alike. Chamber works include *American Journal* for string quartet and baritone on poetry of Robert Hayden, a probing exploration of American identity; two string quartets titled "Refining Fire" (based on Dante) and "Intimations and Incarnations"; the piano quartet *Brooklyn Variations*; percussion works like *Anima* and *Dark Love*; and a major saxophone quartet. Currently Director of Education at the New York Philharmonic, Mr. Wiprud can also help design and deliver educational activities around performances of his work

OREGON

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OHIO

Lisa Whitfield, Viola
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An active orchestral and chamber musician, Lisa Whitfield has also performed as a vocalist and improvising violist. She has appeared with such varied artists as Ray Charles, Shirley Horn, David Murray, the Indigo Girls, Sir Elton John, and the Gorillaz. Orchestra credits include the Radio City Christmas Spectacular and Broadway productions of *Spamalot*, *110 Degrees in the Shade*, *Tommy*, *Big, Frogs*, and *Victor/Victoria*, as well as the Orchestra of St. Luke's, the Philharmonic Orchestra of NJ, and the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. Whitfield can be heard on *Introducing Joss Stone* (released in 2007) and on several Philip Glass film scores.

ADVOCATES

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