

Harp and Soul

In the mid-1950s, the Angelaire, a group of five young female harpists dressed in matching chiffon gowns, toured the U.S. with repertoire as diaphanous as their costumes—swirly arrangements of classical staples, pop songs and the inevitable “Clair de lune.” Their image was well suited to the era’s conception of the harp. And it was exactly what Marcia Dickstein wanted to avoid in 1987 when she started **The Debussy Trio**. The Los Angeles-based ensemble, which features flutist Angela Wiegand, a founding member, and violist David Walther, has fostered a new repertoire for the configuration of Debussy’s 1915 Sonata No. 2, for harp, flute and viola.

“The thing that is different now, which I hope I’m a part of, is the image of the harp,” says

When the trio was launched, it faced a huge handicap—other than the Debussy, there was no body of work for its configuration. Largely through the ensemble’s own efforts, that situation has changed radically in the past two decades. The trio has commissioned more than a hundred pieces, and it runs a biennial competition for new compositions. Moreover, inspired by the trio’s visibility, composers from around the world have sent in pieces “over the transom.” Ten years ago, Dickstein started her own publishing house, Fat Rock Ink, to help disseminate the new repertoire.

The Debussy looks for new music that’s interesting but not forbidding. “I don’t by any means feel like we’re pandering to our audience, but we have to be realistic—we’re not going to play Mozart; we’re not going to play Beethoven,” Dickstein says. “Everything is brand-new to them—the music *and* the instruments. A lot of the music is hard for them, but for a new-music crowd, it’s not crunchy and academic. I don’t want to scare everybody away!”

In order to cultivate this new body of work, Dickstein herself has taken an active role. “The secondary part of my career is to teach composers to write for the harp,” she says. “So many of them approach it as a kind of piano. It really is not; it lies differently in the hand. By showing them how forcefully I can play, it expands their idea of how to write. I’ve had big-name composers say ‘I had no idea the harp could do that!’”

Dickstein leads the life of a busy musician. She teaches and plays orchestral gigs, and she’s also an in-demand studio musician: her work was prominently featured in the film *The Royal Tenenbaums*. But her trio and its legacy remains at the center of her professional concerns. “Long after I’m gone, people will be looking for music to play, and they’ll have this huge body of work,” she says. “It’s a nice life.”

www.debussytrio.com

Dickstein. “It’s not just romantic flowery music. The overly feminized instrument has changed. The range of colors is much wider. It can be used in percussive way. It’s not just background; it’s not just a restaurant instrument. It’s a much more serious instrument than that.”



THE DEBUSSY TRIO’S DICKSTEIN, WIEGAND AND WALTHER

Pod People

Yellow Barn is no longer a vagabond. For almost four decades after cellist David Wells founded the festival in 1969, it was centered in Putney, Vermont. But from 2005 to 2007, while administration and performances remained in Putney, students lived and rehearsed fifty miles away, at Amherst College in Massachusetts. This cumbersome arrangement ended last summer, when everyone finally landed back in Putney, with new, permanent quarters at the Greenwood School. The campus now hosts both of Yellow Barn’s summer programs—its three-week Young Artists Program and the five-week Music School and Festival.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of the move to Greenwood School is Yellow Barn’s own additions to the campus—eight modular “pods” that serve as rehearsal studios and practice spaces. Three of the pods are solar-paneled, generating enough energy to offset the power usage in all eight units. All of them are beautifully situated, looking over Vermont’s splendid bucolic landscape. “You look out and see ponds and forests and meadows,” says Seth Knopp, pianist of the Peabody Trio and Yellow Barn’s artistic director. “It’s the best practice room most people will ever be able to work in. In fact, I walked past the cellist of my trio and she screamed ‘I love this place!’”

Greenwood School uses five of the pods as classrooms during the school year. But Yellow Barn retains control of three of them, an arrangement that allows the festival to offer a fall residency—a week in which a young ensemble can prepare for an upcoming major concert while providing outreach to Greenwood and nearby Brattleboro. The initial outing took place in November with the Ariel Quartet and pianist Roman Rabinovich. “We started from the idea of a residency, but it also provided an opportunity to build relationships,” says Anna Rowe, who last year took over as Yellow Barn’s managing director.

“I’ve been champing at the bit to do something like this,” says Knopp. “I’ve always felt that for performing musicians, these opportunities are rare. Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony are for *creators* of art, not noisy musicians. But music is a lifelong process of exploration and learning. I thought it would be wonderful to be able to invite musicians to pursue projects of their own. This was an exciting first go at that.”

One final change to Yellow Barn’s arrangements—this summer, its 40th anniversary, students at Yellow Barn will participate completely free of charge. The festival has waived tuition in years past but still charged students for room and board. “We’ve been trying to cut that burden, knowing how expensive conservatories can be,” explains Knopp. An anonymous donor has provided funding for five years. Says Rowe: “This gives us time to set things in motion, so this can happen in perpetuity.” www.yellowbarn.org

INSIDE THE POD: YOON-JUNG YANG AND KEATS DIEFFENBACH, VIOLINS; COACH ROGER TAPPING (FORMERLY OF THE TAKACS QUARTET), VIOLA; AND EMMANUELLE BERGERON, CELLO



A **Genius**
for **Jazz**

Miguel Zenón came home to his Brooklyn apartment one afternoon this past September to find an unexpected

message on his voicemail. It was from Daniel J. Socolow, director of the Fellows Program at the MacArthur Foundation, and there was a certain urgency to his tone.

"I called back and he started asking me 'Do you know what the MacArthur Foundation is? Do you know what we do?'" the jazz saxophonist reports. "Then he actually asked me, 'Are you sitting down?'"

Socolow had very good news indeed: Zenón had been chosen as one of 25 recipients of the 2008 MacArthur Fellowships, commonly known as "genius awards." Nobody applies for a MacArthur award; instead, recipients are chosen by a nominating committee that works in secret and finds individuals (generally in science and the arts) "who have shown extraordinary originality and dedication in their creative pursuits." The award is not only prestigious but lucrative, paying out \$500,000 to each recipient over five years.

"It's a big thing," says Zenón. "I'm still trying to grasp the whole thing that's happening."

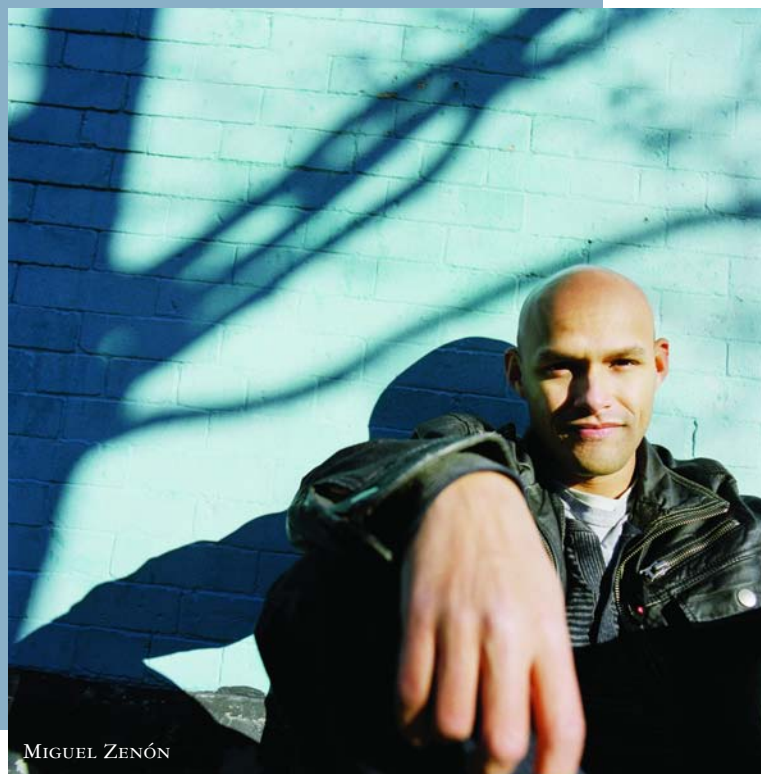
It was the second prestigious grant of the year for Zenón; in April he received a Guggenheim Fellowship to explore *Plena*, the folkloric music of his native Puerto Rico, and fuse it with jazz elements. "Plena is Afro-Caribbean music, very percussive," he explains. "It has always been connected with working-class people. It's very simple music, and has always been thought of in terms of the lyrics, telling a story or an anecdote—it's the newspaper of the people." The "*Plena Project*" bore fruit in December, with the premiere of a new work, *Esta Plena*,

at the Jazz Gallery in New York City, featuring Zenón's quartet, three percussionists and vocal soloists.

So far, the MacArthur award has brought little change to Zenón's personal or professional life. But it may help him carry out a pet project: a tour of Puerto Rico, bringing his music to off-the-beaten-path audiences who normally get little exposure to jazz. "I want to give people to hear the music as *music*, instead of thinking of jazz as the kind of weird thing that it's usually thought of there," he says.

The scheme dovetails with another wish: the hope that the MacArthur funds will provide a measure of freedom from the purely financial aspects of music-making. "When you start doing it, you're not thinking of it as a job," Zenón says. "But once you start taking it seriously [as a career], it becomes quote-unquote 'a business.' I always thought of music as this thing that's freeing—a fun means of expression. I want to bring that into what I do—just play, and open it up for whoever wants to come."

www.miguelzenon.com



MIGUEL ZENÓN



Making
Good in
Motown

Michigan senator Carl Levin offered a toast at the season opening of the **Chamber Music Society of Detroit**, and in fact there was plenty to celebrate.

The organization's 65th anniversary season features a roster of top artists—the Pacifica and Guarneri Quartets, Christian Tetzlaff, Garrick Ohlsson and Yefim Bronfman, among others—and a full slate of outreach activities on its schedule. Ticket sales are brisk; the audience enthusiastic and committed. Its home for the past nine years—the 720-seat Seligman Performing Arts Center at the Detroit Country Day School—is an ideal venue for small-ensemble music. One more cause for good cheer, perhaps the most important of all: CMSD is solvent and secure.

For any arts organization in these beleaguered times, financial stability is hard to achieve. But it's a special accomplishment in Detroit, battered by the cascading fortunes of the Big Three car companies. "Michigan has the worst economic climate in the country," notes Lois Beznos, CMSD's president. "There's more and more competition for less and less revenue. But the Chamber Music Society is a very lean organization. We're in a secure situation—we aren't threatened." In its first decades, the Chamber Music Society was very much a seat-of-the-pants organization, assembling series from year to year without much in the way of financial or artistic planning. Originally showcasing the first-chair musicians of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, CMSD assumed its present identity as a presenter of touring musicians in 1969, when Zalman "Tiny" Konikow took over from its founder, Karl Haas. But it was only more recently, in the mid-1990s, that the organization started serious fund-raising and endowment-building efforts—work that has resulted in its present good health.

"We've always watched our expenses," says Beznos. "We don't spend money we don't have. We wouldn't maintain a program if we didn't know we could pay for it. This means that as we enter this difficult period, our budget is in fine shape. But we read the newspapers; we know we have to think ahead to what's down the line. We have to work harder and harder to maintain that security."

One thing solidly in CMSD's assets column is its core audience, a group of chamber music aficionados, many of them amateur musicians themselves. Beznos attributes the audience's devotion in part to the organization's unwavering focus on classical chamber music. "We don't try to be all things to all people," she says. "We find that people are very loyal to our organization for what it is." She makes an analogy to the recent presidential campaign: "Obama never changed his identity; we won't either."

Given her organization's sturdiness, Beznos sees the current crisis not as a cause for panic but as an opportunity for self-examination. "I don't mean to be Polyanna-ish, but in some ways it can have a positive effect," she says. "It makes all of us stop and reevaluate what we're doing. No doubt the times are hard—I wouldn't want to minimize that, or the problems that people are having. But maybe we'll be better off down the line." www.comehearcmsd.org



TOP: PARTICIPANTS IN RECENT DETROIT CHAMBER MUSIC RESIDENCIES
ABOVE: FULL HOUSE AT THE CMSD
RIGHT: LOIS BEZDOS, CMSD PRESIDENT



Telemann in Tanzania

When **Brenda Schuman-Post** was 14 and a junior-high-school student in New York City, her father (a songwriter and trumpet player) proposed that she take up the oboe. Agreeing to eight private lessons during summer vacation, she was presented with her first instrument, a rental. “As soon as I opened the case,” remembers Schuman-Post, “I knew I was an oboe player.”

Fast forward to 1992 in San Francisco, where the adult Schuman-Post—a veteran soloist and ensemble performer comfortable in diverse genres—had

(a.k.a. African blackwood, a.k.a. *Dalbergia melanoxylon*) and by 2003 had developed a lecture-demonstration on the subject called “Mpingo’s Fruit: Harvesting the Music Tree—the People, the Places, the Process.”

All the while, the oboist cherished a “heart’s desire” to visit the habitat of the African blackwood tree and to meet the people involved in efforts to conserve it, but—being a freelance musician—she had no expectation of doing so. That was before she became aware of **Meet the Composer’s** Global Connections grants. Her proposal—to co-create, through free improvisation, a work for oboe and traditional East African instruments—was funded.

Schuman-Post arrived in Africa in the late summer of 2008. Her project partners—Tanzanian composer Sixtus Koromba and botanist Sebastian Chuwa, director of the African Blackwood Conservation project—arranged for ten days of musical collaboration with four traditional musicians who lived in the Tanzanian village of Kiagata, near Serengeti National Park. Without a common language, the local instrumentalists and the American oboist rehearsed for six to ten hours a day, developing performance pieces that they eventually played on the street, at a wedding party, in a restaurant—and on September 15,

Environmental Day—on Mount Kilimanjaro, in two concerts attended by government officials and environmentalists, as well as teachers, schoolchildren, and local residents.

During her remaining time in Tanzania and Mozambique (the trip received additional support from individual donors to the conservation project,

another oboe-related epiphany. From a British TV documentary called *Mpingo: The Tree that Makes Music*, she learned that the extremely dense wood used for centuries in oboes, clarinets, and Highland pipes is the product of an endangered tree, a species once widespread in sub-Saharan Africa but now restricted to northern Mozambique and southern Tanzania. The film kindled in her a new sense of connection—and indebtedness—to the natural world; she began researching the mpingo



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and from Buffet Crampon USA for recording), Schuman-Post made it her business—guided by botanist Chuwa—to learn as much as possible about *Dalbergia melanoxylon*: “I think I am the only musician who has seen the whole process from start to finish—from the seeking of the tree and its harvesting to the making of woodwind instruments.” Along the way, she performed innumerable informal solo recitals for lumberjacks and conservation workers and villagers—none of whom had ever seen or heard an oboe before (Telemann’s Solo Fantasias invariably got a tremendous response, she reports.)

Back home in California, Schuman-Post now offers a new and improved version of her lecture-performance program on the oboe’s African roots. That her beloved instrument should be a symbol of global understanding makes perfect sense to her: “That’s why the oboe sounds the A. It gathers the group together. It announces that something important is about to happen.” www.oboesoftheworld.com www.blackwoodconservation.org www.mpingoconservation.org



OPPOSITE TOP: BRENDA SCHUMAN-POST WITH THE KIAGATA MUSICIANS AND SIXTUS KOROMBA (WITH KEYBOARD)

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: MPINGO TREES IN A NURSERY SITE FOSTERED BY THE AFRICAN BLACKWOOD CONSERVATION PROJECT

THIS PAGE, TOP: SCHUMAN-POST PLAYS FOR A LUMBERJACK.

ABOVE: MOUNT KILIMANJARO

Brain Food

People who spend their lives making and listening to music may take its cognitive and psychological aspects for granted. But the brain's ability to perceive and process music has become a scientific hot topic. Oliver Sacks's *Musicophilia*, examining a range of neurological responses to music, became a 2007 bestseller. Now the **Library of Congress**, in collaboration with the Dana Foundation, is presenting a two-year-long lecture series, "Music and the Brain," examining the emerging field of "neuromusic"—the intersection of cognitive neuroscience and music.

The series' guiding spirit is Anne McLean, the LOC's senior producer for concerts and special projects. "We got excited about articles we'd read here and there," she says. "This is all very cutting-edge, very timely—the research is brand-new within the year. How does the brain perceive the actual elements of music? Why is certain music dangerous or forbidden?"

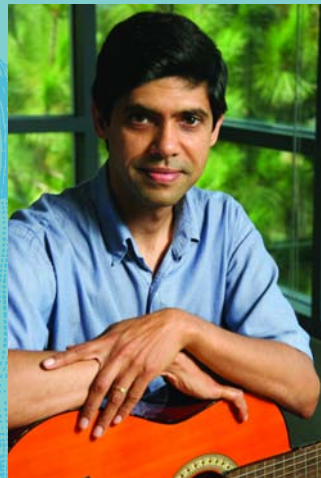
The lecturers on the series include neuroscientists along with anthropologists, psychologists and musicians. In its first year, speakers are focusing on the way we perceive music: the hard-wiring in our brains that make us like music and understand its emotional import, music that makes us weep, and even the use of classical music

as a tool for preventing crime. The second year will examine the ways music training affects the mind—how musicians teach and learn. The lectures will be archived and available as podcasts on the LOC's website.

In McLean's view, the topic couldn't be more central—not just to musicians and neuroscientists, but to the human community. "Music is universal to all cultures—there's no human culture without it," she says. "Everyone is musical: it's a profound element in what makes us human." (For more on the neuroscience of music, see page 62–66 of this issue.)

www.loc.gov/today/pr/2008/08-176.html

EVOLUTIONARY THEORIST STEVEN BROWN, OF MCMASTER UNIVERSITY, (LEFT) AND HARVARD NEUROBIOLOGIST ANIRHUDD D. PATEL (ABOVE) ARE FEATURED SPEAKERS AT THE MUSIC AND THE BRAIN SERIES



SEQUENCES

Violinist and Juilliard alumnus **Nick Eanet**, one of two concertmasters of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, will join the **Juilliard String Quartet** as first violinist in July 2009. Eanet succeeds first violinist Joel Smirnoff, who has become president of the Cleveland Institute of Music.

Judith Hurtig, director of the University of Iowa's **Hancher Auditorium**, will retire on June 30, after 22 years of service. A member of Chamber Music America's board of directors from 1994 until 2000, Hurtig served as CMA's National Conference Chair in 2006.

David J. Baldwin has accepted the position of vice president at **Opus 3 Artists** in New York, resigning his current position as executive director of **Shriver Hall Concert Series**.

The **Boston Chamber Music Society** has appointed violist **Marcus Thompson** as artistic director, to succeed Ronald Thomas at the conclusion of the 2008–2009 season. Thomas, the society's co-founder, will become artistic director emeritus and will remain a member musician.

Saxophonist/composer **Miguel Zenón** has been named a 2008 MacArthur Fellow by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Jennifer Staph is the new administrative director of the **Rembrandt Chamber Players**. She succeeds Rebecca Hill, who will join the faculty of the Merritt School of Music in Chicago.

Two CMA members—the **Afiara String Quartet**, Morrison Fellowship Quartet-in-Residence at San Francisco State University's International Center for the Arts, and flutist **Claire Chase**, founding director of the **International Contemporary Ensemble**—won the Concert Artists Guild Competition in October 2008. The Afiara's members are Valerie Li and Yuri Cho, violins; David Samuel, viola; and Adrian Fung, cello.

Miguel Angel Corzo has resigned as president of the **Colburn School**. Board vice-chair Susan Keran Solomon will assume the role of interim president.

Francesco Milioto is artistic director of the Chicago-based ensemble **Accessible Contemporary Music** for the 2008–2009 season. Milioto is also music director of the Skokie Valley Symphony Orchestra and the Highland Park Strings, and assistant conductor and rehearsal pianist for the Ravinia Festival.

James Undercofler, president and chief executive of the Philadelphia Orchestra, will step down when his contract expires on July 31.

The **Doris Duke Charitable Foundation** has named its current chief executive officer, Edward P. Henry, to serve as the organization's president, effective January 1, 2009. Henry, who succeeds founding DDCF president Joan E. Spero, will retain the CEO position as well.

In Memoriam

Jane Cochran, oboist, New York City Ballet Orchestra

Moshe Cotel, pianist and composer

Thomas Dunn, conductor, Handel and Haydn Society

Jesse Levine, violist, Bruch Trio; principal, Buffalo, Dallas, Baltimore and New Jersey symphonies; music director, New Britain and Norwalk symphonies; faculty, Yale School of Music, the Henry and Lucy Moses School of Music

Peter J. Levinson, music publicist, jazz biographer

Gail Robinson, soprano, Metropolitan Opera

J. Willard Roosevelt, composer; faculty, Hartt School, Longy School of Music

Paola Saffiotti, pianist; founder National Institutes of Health (NIH) Music Series

Jascha Silberstein, cellist; principal, Metropolitan Opera Orchestra

George Sopkin, founding cellist, Fine Arts Quartet; cellist, New England Piano Quartette, Carnegie-Mellon Trio; faculty, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Kneisel Hall

Richard Sudhalter, jazz musician, historian, critic