

American Ensemble

sfSound Thinking

The name is deliberately enigmatic. **sfSound** is based in the Bay Area, but the “sf” doesn’t necessarily refer to San Francisco. According to clarinetist/composer Matt Ingalls, the organization’s founder, it might also mean “sforzando”—but he won’t take a stand in either direction. The ambiguity is deliberate: it conveys a sense of an organization whose identity shifts to fit evolving circumstances.

In its broad outlines, sfSound is a collective of composing musicians: Ingalls, Kyle Bruckman (oboe), John Ingle (saxophone), Christopher Jones (piano and bassoon), Kjell Nordeson (percussion), Monica Scott (cello) and Erik Ulman (violin). The group performs and presents new music along with “classics” of the last fifty years. Aside from mounting concerts in the Bay Area, sfSound curates an online radio station, sfSoundRadio. It also presents the annual San Francisco Tape Music Festival: a three-day marathon of works composed for recorded media.

One longstanding focus for sfSound is the explo-

ration of the commonalities between notated and improvised music. A March concert at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music offered a typical program, with works by Milton Babbitt and Salvatore Sciarrino, with improvisations by group members and a performance of *December 1952*, Earle Brown’s pioneering graphically notated score.

The group is very much a product of its Bay Area environment. Its members, for the most part, emerged from the composition departments of nearby educational institutions—Mills, Stanford, Berkeley. In San Francisco, they have found an audience willing to follow them down unusual paths. “In a lot of places in the country, we probably couldn’t survive on the kind of music we present,” says Ingalls. “But the Bay Area has a tradition of the experimental and the weird.”

The ultimate guide to the music sfSound programs is the taste of the group’s members themselves. “Our general philosophy is that we present music we want to hear,” says Ingalls. “As long as we program concerts that we ourselves would go to—it works.” www.sf-sound.org

SfSound’s core:
(L TO R) JONES,
ULMAN,
INGALLS,
SCOTT,
BRUCKMANN
(HIDDEN),
NORDESON,
INGLE



Wichita Pine Man

In 1958, as a freshman at Harding College in Arkansas, Bob Scott heard a visiting string quartet. It was his first live chamber music concert and a transformative experience: “I fell in love,” Scott says. The encounter led him toward a master’s in music education and five years as a high school choral teacher. Scott left music to go into business, but he stayed involved as a bass soloist and choir director. He ran an insurance agency, then started his own Christmas tree farm, Prairie Pines, half an hour outside of Wichita, Kansas.

Scott and his wife, Patsy, built a barn on the property, using it to sell trees during the holiday season and renting it out for parties and weddings during the rest of the year. In the mid-1990s, Catherine Consiglio, a viola professor at Wichita State University, played a freelance gig there and realized it would be an ideal setting for chamber music concerts. The scheme gave Scott a chance to reconnect with his longstanding love of ensemble music. “As soon as I said something,” she reports, “Bob jumped all over it.”

The result was **Chamber Music at The Barn**, celebrating its 15th anniversary this summer, with Scott still in place as executive director and Consiglio as artistic director. “Catherine plans the musical season; I plan how to pay for it,” Scott says. The series fills a gap in the area’s cultural scene, taking place in summer, when the Wichita Symphony and the Music Theatre of Wichita aren’t performing. The barn mixes classical chamber music with crossover fare: this summer, the 140-seat venue is hosting two string quartets, the Pro Arte and the Harrington, along with the Quebe Sisters Band, a western fiddle group, and Mike Marshall and Caterina Lichtenberg, a mandolin duo. For an extra \$15, ticket holders can eat a buffet dinner in the garden; another crowd comes to picnic outside while watching the concert on an eight-foot television.

However they choose to experience the music, audience members encounter an atmosphere that is emphatically informal. “I wear my Bermuda shorts and tennis shoes,” Scott says. “We try to

make this thing accessible to the public, not sterile. Everyone has a good time.”

Aside from its concert series, CMATB hosts four educational camps, including a mandolin camp, run by Marshall and Lichtenberg, and Camp Da Capo for adult amateurs. Its two other camps are aimed squarely at the younger generation: Bows at the Barn, a week of intensive study for middle- and high-school musicians, and Northeast Area Strings Academy of Wichita, a two-month day camp targeted to African American string students.

In Scott’s view, these youth-related activities are a matter of survival. “It’s the right thing to do, and it’s also called selfishness,” he says. “I look out at the crowd and see a bunch of gray heads. If we don’t develop an audience, we’ll be dinosaurs at some point.”



A STRING QUARTET AT BOWS AT THE BARN
CHAMBER MUSIC CAMP.

CMATB has recently had some rough times financially, largely due to cutbacks in state funding for the arts, and necessitating some trimming of the budget. But this has not daunted Scott. “I’m hooked on it—I have to keep it going,” he says. “The older I get, the more I realize that music is basic to the soul.” www.cmatb.org

THE AMERIGO TRIO:
KAREN DREYFUS,
INBAL SEGEV, AND
GLENN DICTEROW.



Moonlighting With a full-time job as concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic—along with a thriving career as a soloist and teaching posts at Juilliard and the Manhattan School of Music—Glenn Dicterow would seem an unlikely candidate for another regular gig. But in 2009, the violinist joined with his wife, violist Karen Dreyfus, and cellist Inbal Segev to form the **Amerigo Trio**.

afterward to choose repertoire and start planning programs.

Aside from string trio standards like the Serenades of Beethoven and Dohnányi—the works on the group’s debut CD, on Navona Records—the Amerigo explores little-known works, such as the trios of Leo Weiner (“the Hungarian Mendelssohn,” according to Segev) and Gideon Klein, who died at age 22 in the Nazis’ Fürstengrube forced-labor camp. (See “Music Silenced and Regained,” page 48.) The group’s configuration allows it to serve as the basis for several protean configurations: in April, for example, pianist Giselle Witowski joined the trio at Connecticut’s Hotchkiss School for a program including the Schumann piano quartet and the Kodaly Op. 7 duo for violin and cello.

Segev is a neighbor of the Dicterows, which makes it relatively easy for the three to schedule rehearsals. But their performance schedule is limited by other commitments—chiefly, Dicterow’s Philharmonic responsibilities. Still, the violinist sees his chamber music work as part of an exit strategy when he eventually relinquishes his concertmaster duties.

It’s also a chance to engage in a kind of music-making very different from his usual assignments. “Chamber music has a kind of completeness to it,” he says. “Instead of following the direction of a conductor, we all get to chip in. You can be really creative interpretively.” Along with Dreyfus, he had previously played chamber music as a member of the Lyric Piano Quartet, but he now relishes the transparency of the string trio sound. “It’s pure,” he says. “There’s nowhere to hide; no way to cover it up. It makes an honest musician of you.”

www.amerigotrio.com

The trio has its roots in the 2007 Bowdoin International Chamber Music Festival, where a performance of the Brahms Op. 18 Sextet gave Dicterow and Dreyfus a first chance to work with Segev in a chamber-music setting. Dicterow says: “I was blown away by her playing.” The three musicians assembled soon

Community Service

Jason Kao Hwang's jazz suite *Burning Bridge* starts off with extended solos for two Chinese instruments, the pipa and the erhu. The musicians improvise within their traditional language, at times accompanying Hwang's jazz violin. A cornet player joins them for some funky avant-jazz riffs; and soon enough, the whole ensemble settles into a slow, driving swing beat.

The extraordinary thing about the piece (commissioned through a Chamber Music America *New Jazz Works* grant) is that, for all of its disparate instruments and influences, it forms a cohesive whole. "The world is so organized according to aesthetic categories and the expectations of ethnicity," Hwang says. "But in [this work's] creative space, those categories don't exist."

Putting the work together involved getting musicians from different traditions to work in synchrony. "When you're composing music that employs improvisation, the first compositional decision you make is the people you bring into the ensemble," Hwang says. "For me the sound of the group is a place—a geographical, psychological place. Sun Li, the pipa player, had never worked with jazz musicians, but we tried to create *spaces* where she could feel at home—and she was fearless. The process, which really requires mutual respect and empathy, creates a community."

Musical community has been a constant in Hwang's three decades as a performing musician. Toward the beginning of his career, he played with the jazz cooperative *Commitment*, a chapter of his life that he had the opportunity to revisit last year, when the Lithuanian record label No Business released a two-CD compilation *Commitment: The Complete Recordings 1981–1983*. (The website *All About Jazz* named the album as the Best Reissue of 2010.)

Hwang was at first reluctant to listen to his youthful self. "I thought I might not like it," he says. But the re-listening experience proved illuminating: "I heard the kind of abandon I played with at that time, and I shouldn't ever forget that."

The last movement of *Burning Bridge*, composed so many years later, includes a theme that first came to Hwang during that period. "The melody was strong, but I didn't know how to develop it," he says. "And I couldn't have written for octet when I was 22." But his skills were developing in the intervening time, and the mature composer of *Burning Bridge* encountered a familiar figure on the *Commitment* album: "It made me realize that essentially I haven't changed," Hwang says. "The essence that illuminates the sound is *me*."

www.jasonkaohwang.com



JASON KAO HWANG

Hello, Dalí!

In a **Dalí Quartet** concert, Beethoven rubs shoulders with Turina; Beethoven with Villa-Lobos. The Philadelphia-based ensemble is made up of three Venezuelans (violinists Luigi Mazzocchi and Carlos Rubio and violist Adriana Linares) and a Puerto Rican (cellist Jesús Morales) and has made a specialty of Spanish and Latin American music. But it is rooted in the classics of Central Europe.

made a true commitment to education. Each summer since 2004, the quartet has run a summer program in North Wales, Pennsylvania, thirty miles from Philadelphia. The Dalí Quartet Summer Camp and Festival provides inner-city students, from elementary school to college, with a week of rehearsals, workshops and masterclasses. The foursome is also the quartet-in-residence with Philadelphia's outreach-oriented Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra, founded to foster ethnic diversity in classical music. All of these activities are helping bring chamber music to young musicians and new audiences.

In performance, the Dalís help the audience connect the dots—by pointing out, for instance, how the Native American influences in a Dvořák quartet give it a kinship with *clave* rhythms of Afro-Cuban music. “Even if it’s in a formal venue, one of the things that makes the experience is the interaction between the audience and the performers,” says Linares. “People enjoy the fact that there’s a person behind the performer. Also, the nature of our music is very upbeat. You start with beautiful classical music, and end up with a sense of something party-like that lets the audience have an electric experience.”

www.daliquartet.com



THE DALÍ QUARTET

“Classical music is the *school* of string ensemble playing,” says Adriana Linares, the quartet’s violist. “If you’re able to put together a quartet by Mozart or Haydn, you’ve got all the tools. From there, you can go onto any style.”

One huge inspiration for the quartet’s activities is El Sistema, Venezuela’s national music education system, and a guiding force in the Dalí’s own history. Mazzocchi and Rubio are both products of El Sistema; Linares studied with El Sistema musicians and has herself gone back to Venezuela to teach as part of the system. As if in emulation, the Dalí has

Narrative Drive

Austin-based composer **Graham Reynolds** likes to tell stories. His new CD, *The Difference Engine*, is a five-movement triple concerto based on the life of Charles Babbage, a 19th-century inventor whose “difference engine” anticipated the modern computer. The work had its genesis during a talk on Babbage given by software engineer L.B. Deyo at Dionysium, a freewheeling lecture/film/music series at Austin’s Alamo Drafthouse Cinema. Reynolds actually started composing while Deyo was speaking: “I got up the next morning and wrote it down,” he says. *The Difference Engine* (featuring violinist Leah Zeger, cellist Jonathan Dexter, Reynolds on piano, and a 12-piece string orchestra) follows no explicit scenario, but it nonetheless has the emotional specificity of good film music. Small wonder that the composer has also written a number of scores for feature films, documentaries and shorts, including director Richard Linklater’s *A Scanner Darkly* and the upcoming *Bernie*. Reynolds has provided original music for screenings of silent film classics, and is also a composer/member of two cutting-edge Austin theater troupes, the Salvage Vanguard Company and Rude Mechanicals.

“I enjoy narrative structure and applying it to music,” Reynolds says. “I know it’s Romantic, but it pulls things out of me. If you’re working on a film—let’s say it’s a western—it gets very different music out of you than a blues form or a sonata form. It pushes me, color-wise.” For the dark comedy *Bernie*, Reynolds has devised a score composed largely of hymns. By contrast, the documentary *Incendiary*, the story of a disturbing capital-punishment case, make him turn to the eerie sounds of the “software instrument” known as the Omnisphere.

Reynolds’s compositional versatility has been a constant in his career. He is a musician who resists pigeonholing. His Golden Arm Trio isn’t quite a rock band, a jazz ensemble or a classical new-music group. (For that matter, it isn’t a trio, either, but a fluidly organized performing collective, with Graham as its only permanent member.)

It had its start in punk rock clubs but, as Reynolds says, “You can imagine it was a change of pace from what was usually going on in those places. We weren’t working in pop-song structure for the most part, but we had more pop drive and feel than typical jazz or classical groups.”

As a boy, Reynolds and his brother took classical piano lessons and unnerved their teacher when they started improvising. The next step was jazz lessons, but as Reynolds puts it, “we weren’t playing jazz.” Reynolds forged ahead to create his own sound and style. Nonetheless, his recent CD release *Duke! Three Portraits of Ellington* represents an idiosyncratic embrace of classic jazz.

In it, Reynolds presents Ellington standards in three guises—first, in his own hard-driving band arrangements for the Golden Arm Trio, then freely transformed string-quartet versions, then seven remixers’ versions of the Golden Arm recordings.

The idea wasn’t to replicate the style of Ellington’s band, but to offer a 21st-century version of his interpretive strategy. “Only his band could play his arrangements the way they were meant to be played,” says Reynolds. “We weren’t trying to be Johnny Hodges or Sonny Greer. We were trying to make these songs work the way *we* play them.” www.grahamreynolds.com



GRAHAM REYNOLDS

SEGUES

The **American Music Center** and **Meet The Composer** will merge into a new advocacy and service organization—New Music USA—combining their grant-making and media programs. **American Composers Forum** will take over AMC’s membership services. The venture is expected to open by the end of 2011, with MTC’s Ed Harsh as president and CEO.

Joseph Genualdi, violinist and co-founder of the **Chicago Chamber Musicians**, is retiring as the group’s artistic director at the close of this season. He will be succeeded by ensemble artists **Charles Geyer** and **Meng-Chieh Liu**. Genualdi will remain a member of the ensemble.

Percussionist **Steven Schick** is the new artistic director the **San Francisco Contemporary Music Players**. An alumnus of the Bang on a Can All-Stars, Schick is also founding artistic director of the percussion ensemble red fish blue fish; music director and conductor of the La Jolla Symphony and Chorus; Distinguished Professor of Music at University of California, San Diego; and Consulting Artist in Percussion at the Manhattan School of Music.

Steve Wogaman has been appointed president of the **Chamber Music Society of Detroit**, succeeding **Lois Beznos**. Wogaman has previously headed the Allentown (PA) and Canton (OH) Symphony Orchestras.

Bryant Park Quartet’s founding violist **Adam Meyer** has left the ensemble to become associate dean for administration at **The Juilliard School**. Succeeding Meyer is **Nathan Schramm**, first-prize winner of the 2009 ASTA Solo Competition and a graduate of Indiana University, where he studied with Alan deVeritch.

Starting in summer 2012, **Robert Spano**, music director of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, will be music director of the **Aspen Music Festival and School**. Spano succeeds David Zinman, who resigned.

In Memoriam

Eugenio Arango (“Totico”), percussionist, singer

Leonard Arner, oboist

John E. Balamos, pianist

Jack Gottlieb, composer

Lee Hoiby, composer

Yakov Kreizberg, conductor

Joe Morello, drummer, Dave Brubeck Quartet, Marian McPartland Trio

Blanche Moyse, violinist, Moyse Trio; co-founder, Marlboro Music School and Festival; choral conductor; founder, Brattleboro Music Center

Margaret Price, soprano

Johannes Somary, organist, composer, conductor; founding music director, Amor Artis Chorus and Orchestra

Emanuel Vardi, violist

DIRECTORY OF FESTIVALS AND SCHOOLS: A CORRECTION

The Festival Directory’s listing for Summertrios, a program for adult amateur chamber musicians, contained some inaccuracies. The correct 2011 information is below.

Summertrios, Inc.

June 5–12, Bryn Mawr, PA

Premium Program June 19–26, Chambersburg, PA

Strings and piano June 26–July 3, Chambersburg, PA
Strings, woodwinds, and piano

Lily Friedman
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New York, NY 10025
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In the Premium Program, adult amateurs work on their choice of chamber music repertoire with an ensemble of professional musicians. Faculty/student ratio is 1:1. Fee is determined by choice of repertoire and resulting size of ensemble needed. Week 1 of the Regular Program, at Wilson College, for adult amateur string players and pianists, also includes a program for string novices. Week 2 is open to woodwinds, as well as strings and piano, and has faculty on every woodwind instrument. Intense effort made to meet individual needs with personalized schedules. Also available is an Enrichment Program providing extra playing time with all-professional ensembles. Tape required (for placement in peer groupings only, not for acceptance). In all programs, performance opportunities and CDs are available.