

Grand Haydn Slam

How better to mark the 200th anniversary of Haydn's death than to perform all 83 of the composer's string quartets? Just such an event took place in Iowa City this past November. Led by the University of Iowa's **Maia Quartet** (Tricia Park and Zoran Jakovic, violins; Elizabeth Oakes, viola; Hannah Holman, cello), one hundred fifty musicians, ages 8 to 78, participated in a Haydn Quartet Slam before an audience



AT THE SLAM:
PAT ADDIS AND
THE MAIA QUARTET

that came and went—and definitely built—over five full days.

Planning had begun the year before, when Holman was having coffee with Patricia Addis, a retired university administrator and a fine amateur cellist. The two decided that the Maia would make its selections first—the ensemble chose the “Emperor” (Op. 76, No. 3) and “Seven Last Words” (Op. 51, Nos. 1-7)—and then open up the field to foursomes throughout the community. Any works not chosen would fall to the Maia—who ultimately played 26.

The Slam was an opportunity to focus all the music-making in Iowa City on a huge project. An organizing committee reflected the major players in the local classical music world—in addition to Holman and Addis (representing the Community String Orchestra and ACMP, The Chamber Music Network), there were representatives from the Iowa City Schools and the Preucil School of Music. Addis played matchmaker and established the performance schedule. Given the diversity of musicians and personal logistics, the 83 works couldn't be presented chronologically. But the “Sunrise” (Op. 76, No. 4) was played at 9:00 A.M. and Op. 103, Haydn's final, unfinished quartet, was last.

Among the performers were physicians, lawyers, teachers, historians, physicists and music professionals. Some groups had been together for years; others were on “blind dates.” An ensemble of 8- to 10-year-olds worked up one movement of the “Lark” (Op. 64, No. 5), and their teachers played the other three. Six University of Iowa student ensembles were coached by the Maia (violinist Beth Oakes reports that, throughout, she was channeling the voice of Juilliard String Quartet violinist Earl Carlyss, her own Haydn quartet coach of many years ago). Other student quartets came from colleges as far away as Des Moines. Three members of the now-retired Stradivari Quartet, which preceded the Maia as the

university's resident ensemble, also participated.

No one person heard all 83 quartets (the record was 66!), but the Slam allowed the audience to enter Haydn's musical world in a sustained, satisfying way. For Addis and Holman, the variety of participants was the most moving aspect of the experience. “Each quartet I heard,” says Holman, “no matter who was playing, was a joy and a revelation.”

www.maiaquartet.com

Fantastic Voyage

The name comes from a Federico García Lorca poem, “Procesión” (“Procession”), describing “Fantásticos Merlins” marching in a surrealistic parade. When saxophonist Nathan Hanson and bassist Brian Roessler first saw the phrase, they couldn’t figure out its exact meaning. Tellingly, it was the music in the words that intrigued them. “We liked the sound of them—it’s as simple as that,” Hanson explains.

The **Fantastic Merlins** formed a decade ago as a Twin Cities-based trio featuring Hanson, Roessler and cellist Jacqueline Ultan; soon after its founding, drummer Federico Ughi joined to make it a quartet. “The idea from the beginning has been to improvise pieces, or to develop a sound that’s based on improvising,” says Hanson. A composition from one of the group’s members will sometimes form the basis for improvisation, although sometimes a piece will be improvised from scratch. Instead of the head-solo-solo-head structure of classic jazz, the Merlins aim toward a freer kind of improvisation. “We work hard at trying to blur the distinction between composed and improvised material,” says Hanson. “We try to improvise as an ensemble—all the parts at once.”

The result defies categorization. The four original musicians came from varied backgrounds:

Hanson and Ughi both had strong jazz roots, while Ultan had classical training, and Roessler came from rock and roll—he was an electric bassist who had recently realized a longstanding goal to play the acoustic double bass. Ultan and Ughi have moved on, replaced by drummer Peter Hennig and cellist Matt Turner, but the Merlins’ musical identity continues to blur genre boundaries. “The pieces I write don’t really sound like jazz; the stuff Brian writes sound even less like jazz tunes,” says Hanson. “For lack of a better term, we’re finding the place where contemporary classical music overlaps with new jazz.”

In February the Merlins embark on an intriguing project—and yet another experiment in genre bending. The group will head to the Festival Sons d’hiver in suburban Paris, bringing along rock singer Darren Jackson to perform new versions of 10 Leonard Cohen songs. “The songs are really beautiful, but they’re so difficult: they’re not like the typical jazz thing of ‘this is a Broadway show tune,’” says Hanson.

“We’re approaching our music like the composer/performers we admire and emulate,” Hanson says. “Which is to find our own thing to say, working out a way to say it, and finding places for people to receive it.” www.fantasticmerlins.com



MERLINS, L TO R:
PETER HENNIG,
NATHAN HANSON,
AND
BRIAN ROESSLER.
NOT PICTURED:
CELLIST
MATT TURNER.

Relationship Builders

When we spoke to Jennifer Kloetzel, cellist of the **Cypress String Quartet**, she and her colleagues were ensconced at Lebanon Valley College in Annville, Pennsylvania. Small surprise there: the San Francisco-based quartet spends about a third of its time on the road. But the musicians' work on tour goes far beyond the 80 or so concerts they give annually. The October 1 Lebanon Valley concert, for example, was planned as the culmination of two and a half days of activity—masterclasses in quartet playing, individual-instrument classes, coaching sessions, even a seminar in the business of music.

"It isn't as satisfying to go to a city, then move on and go to the next city," Kloetzel says. "It's more satisfying to go into the community and get to know the people, and then play. When you do this year after year, you develop relationships with people. And a lot of what we do is about relationships."

None of this is haphazard: the quartet has dedicated itself to supplementing its music-making with a range of outreach and educational projects. For instance: *Inspired by America*, a multimedia show tailored for schools. Based on the writings of philosopher Jacob Needleman, it intersperses film clips and photographs with performances of excerpts from American quartets, ranging from Dvořák's "American" Quartet to Jennifer Higdon's *Impressions*. "It's all about getting people in to hear the music," says Kloetzel.

Another ongoing project is *Call and Response*—a series of commissions, one every year since 2000, with each new work a "response" to a favorite repertory piece. The 2009 commission, *Lento Assai*, was composer Kevin Puts's response to the slow movement of Beethoven's Op. 135; in this year's commission, Elena Ruehr looks at the ways words

can inspire music, as in Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*. Her own String Quartet No. 5 takes as its starting point Ann Patchett's novel *Bel Canto*.

The Cypress puts together programs grouping its *Call and Response* commissions with the works that inspired them; it will present its 2010 program in a group of area schools before the formal premiere at San Francisco's Herbst Theatre on February 26. Outreach efforts like this are at the core of the group's identity. "People are always complaining that concert audiences are dying, but it's partly because we don't spend the time to get younger people excited," says Kloetzel.

In 2003, the Cypress incorporated as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. It now has two full-time administrative staffers—an executive director and a director of administration and education—along with a number of consultants. This structure allows the Cypress to operate as more than just a musical ensemble, but a complex performing and educational operation. It also frees the players to focus on purely musical endeavors—such as their recordings of the late Beethoven quartets, the first volume of which was released last summer.

"Our model is to change how classical musical can be represented out there," says Kloetzel. "But it all comes back to playing the music we want to play."

www.cypressquartet.com

CYPRESSES, L TO R: VIOLIST ETHAN FILNER,
VIOLINISTS CECILY WARD AND TOM STONE,
CELLIST JENNIFER KLOETZEL



The Dorian Model

It started as a summer gig. In 1960, flutist John Perras got in touch with his Queens College classmate, bassoonist Jane Taylor, to tell her about a job opportunity in Tanglewood's composition department. The program had a string quartet in residence, along with a pianist and singers, but it needed a woodwind quintet to perform the works of the young composers (who were under the guidance of Aaron Copland, no less). The initial group was, in Taylor's words, "polyglot"—five musicians who didn't necessarily speak each other's musical language and who spent much of the summer just trying to get into sync. Perras hit on the idea of assembling a permanent wind quintet, ready to hit the ground running the next summer. The group got together and rehearsed in the winter and, in summer 1961, the newly formed **Dorian Wind Quintet** headed up to Tanglewood.

Jump ahead five decades, as the Dorian gears up to celebrate its 50th anniversary. Taylor, the last founding member, retired in 2002. But she has kept involved with the ensemble as its president. The current ensemble—Gretchen Pusch, flute; Gerard Reuter, oboe; Jerry Kirkbride, clarinet; John Hunt, bassoon and Karl Kramer-Johansen, horn—reached their musical maturity in a world where the Dorian was already a distinct presence. "It was part of my upbringing as a young flutist," says Pusch.

One thing that has changed: the current group has a lighter schedule than the quintet had in its early years. In the 1960s and 70s, the ensemble had a "roving residency" with the SUNY university system, traveled New York State with support from the state Council of the Arts and regularly took part in education programs in the New York public school system. With the dwindling of public support for arts endeavors, these engagements dried up, and the current members combine their quintet activities with a variety of individual freelance and teaching activities. "Back in 1970, when I joined, it was a full time job," says Kirkbride. "Now it's a wonderful escape from the other work we do."

Still, the anniversary year promises to be rich. Among its highlights will be a new piece by David del Tredici, with funding from a CMA Classical Commissioning Program grant. In anticipation of the milestone ahead, the ensemble has released *Retrospectacular*, a two-CD set with live performances from throughout the Dorians'

history. And for all the change in personnel and circumstances, the group's essential musical identity has remained intact for nearly fifty years. "I can't say we ever had a bad player," says Jane Taylor. "John Perras wanted to set a standard for wind playing—and I think we ended up doing just that." www.dorianwindquintet.org



THE DORIAN WIND QUINTET TODAY: JOHN HUNT, KARL KRAMER-JOHANSEN, GRETCHEN PUSCH, JERRY KIRKBRIDE AND GERARD REUTER.



THE ORIGINAL DORIANS AND FRIENDS: (BACK ROW) DAVID PERKETT (OBOE), WILLIAM G. BROWN (HORN), COMPOSERS WOLFGANG FORTNER AND ROBERTO GERHARD, ARTHUR BROWN (CLARINET); (FRONT ROW) JOHN PERRAS AND JANE TAYLOR

SEQUENCES

Janet Karpus has been named executive director of **Garth Newel Music Center**, in Warm Springs, Virginia. She succeeds Jacob Yarrow (now with Hancher Auditorium in Iowa). Karpus's past positions include that of executive director of Fontana Concert Society, now Fontana Chamber Arts; and she has served on the board of the contemporary music ensemble Opus 21.

Herbert Barrett Management has merged with Vantage Artists Management. Roster and staff of the two New York City agencies, now called **Barrett Vantage Artists**, will remain in their entirety, with John Anderson as president; Emmy Tu as managing director; and **Mary Lynn Fixler** as senior vice-president.

The **Orchestra of St. Luke's** has appointed **Katy Clark** executive director. Clark, most recently St. Luke's managing director, succeeds **Marianne Lockwood**, who will remain as president until her retirement in August 2010. A St. Luke's co-founder, Lockwood has been at the organization's helm since 1974.

Harlem Quartet violist **Juan-Miguel Hernandez** was awarded first place in his instrument's category at the International Johannes Brahms Competition in Pörtschach, Austria.

Carol Shiffman has succeeded Aaron Flagg as executive director of the **Music Conservatory of Westchester** (NY). Most recently, Shiffman was dean of SUNY Purchase's Conservatory of Dance; before that, she chaired the Music Department at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, WA.

Isaiah Sheffer, co-founder and artistic director of **Symphony Space**, will retire this year. Current executive director **Cynthia Elliott** will become president and CEO; and associate artistic director and music curator **Laura Kaminsky**—a CMA board member—will assume the position of senior vice president and artistic director.

In Memoriam

Antonio Luis Alves de Souza, drummer, Olodum and Didá ensembles; educator and social activist

Maryanne Amacher, composer
Marylou Speaker Churchill, violinist, Boston Symphony, Boston Pops, BSO Chamber Players; faculty, New England Conservatory

Art D'Lugoff, jazz and theater impresario, The Village Gate

Wilma Cozart Fine, record producer, Mercury Records

Michael Galasso, violinist, composer
Allen Hughes, music and dance critic, *New York Times*; book reviewer, *Chamber Music* magazine

Dick Katz, pianist, record producer, educator, writer

H.C. Robbins Landon, musicologist, broadcaster, writer; co-founder, Haydn Society

Jerald Lepinski, choral director, Classic Chorale; former faculty, Rocky Ridge Music Center

Kurt Loebel, violinist, Cleveland Orchestra, CIM String Quartet, Symphonia Quartet; faculty, Kent/Blossom, Cleveland Institute of Music

Stacy Rowles, trumpeter, flugel-hornist; Jazz Birds, Maiden Voyage, Witchcraft

Hale Smith, classical composer, jazz arranger and pianist