



February 2008

ORION'S UPCOMING SPRING CONCERTS

Orion's upcoming concerts include some of the musicians' favorite chamber music, as well as works by composers whose names may be a bit less familiar. (Some of the pieces fall into both categories.) In order to whet your musical appetite, I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce composers whose works are programmed this spring and give you a few notes about the pieces themselves.

The March concerts include a work by Ingolf Dahl (1912-1970), *Concerto a Tre* (1947) for clarinet, violin, and cello. A Swede born in Germany, Dahl emigrated to Switzerland with the rise of the Nazis, and in 1938 came to the United States, which he adopted as his home. He was influenced by many different styles of music, and his career had a variety of musical outlets. He was a friend of Igor Stravinsky, an accompanist for the English comedienne Gracie Fields, a composition student of renowned teacher Nadia Boulanger, a Hollywood radio arranger, a professor at the University of Southern California, a recipient of numerous awards and grants including a Guggenheim Fellowship, a teacher at Tanglewood, a champion of 20th century composers, an orchestral conductor, and a virtuoso pianist.

Dahl wrote the *Concerto a Tre* for a Swiss conductor/clarinetist who had given him the idea for the thematic material. Dahl chose both an unusual instrumental combination and an unusual title for a chamber work. (The Concerto title is traditionally reserved for works involving a soloist with orchestra.) But like more "standard" concertos, this Concerto explores sound possibilities of the given instruments, sometimes emphasizing the contrast between the wind and string instrumental sounds (as in the 2nd movement, where the warm clarinet timbre is contrasted with the cold high string harmonics), sometimes engaging the three instruments jointly in a chordal or fugal texture. The work is in three sections with a fast-slow-fast scheme. It contains virtuosic writing for all three instruments (including a clarinet cadenza), rhythms influenced by jazz, polyphonic textures, and an open, listenable quality that was the hallmark of Dahl's American works.

Both the musical breadth and the stylistic eclecticism of Dahl are matched by those of Morton Gould (1913-1996), the American composer of *Benny's Gig* (1962) for clarinet and bass, programmed on the April/May concerts. Like Dahl, Gould arranged music for radio and was a conductor and a composer. A Pulitzer Prize-winner, he wrote concert music, as well as music for ballet and film, and even musicals. He was also a fabulous improviser at the piano. Like Dahl, his music shows substantial jazz and classical influence, but he also incorporates elements from other American idioms, including folk,

Spring Concert Series

CONCERT 3

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 227 East Side Drive, Geneva

SUNDAY, MARCH 16, 2008

3:00 p.m. - Music Institute of Chicago,
 Nichols Hall - 1490 Chicago Avenue, Evanston

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19, 2008

7:30 p.m. - Ganz Hall, Roosevelt University,
 430 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago

CONCERT 4

**With guest: Robert Kassinger
 Bassist, Chicago Symphony Orchestra**

SUNDAY, APRIL 13, 2008

7:00 p.m. - Fox Valley Presbyterian Church,
 227 East Side Drive, Geneva

SUNDAY, APRIL 20, 2008

3:00 p.m. - Music Institute of Chicago,
 Nichols Hall - 1490 Chicago Avenue, Evanston

WEDNESDAY, MAY 21, 2008

7:30 p.m. - Ganz Hall, Roosevelt University,
 430 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago

Upcoming Events

Free Concert

Monday, March 10, 12:15 pm

Chicago Cultural Center, Preston Bradley Hall

Free Admission

WFMT Live Broadcast (98.7 FM)

Monday, April 14, 2008, 8:00 pm.

WFMT Fine Arts Radio

Concert and Master Class

Sunday, May 4, 2008

Master Class: 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm; Concert: 3:30 pm

Naperville School District O.P.U.S.

gospel, and country-and-western. (He even incorporated a rapper and a fire department into two works written for the Pittsburgh Youth Symphony, entitled *The Jogger* and the *Dinosaur and Hosedown* respectively.)

Most of *Benny's Gig* was written to celebrate Benny Goodman's Russian tour in 1962; the last of the eight duos was added for Benny's 70th birthday. Each duo is unique in mood and style—from somber to syncopated to lyrical to calypso—and each reveals some aspect of the instruments' capabilities and characters. Orion is delighted to welcome bassist Robert Kassinger of the Chicago Symphony, to perform these duos with Kathy Pirtle.

Like many of Orion's concerts, the April/May set also includes a work by a living composer. Orion is eagerly awaiting the score for a piece commissioned in celebration of our 15th season, by Erling Patrick Horn. Many of you may remember *Black Tango* for clarinet, violin, cello, and piano, programmed on Orion's 2005-2006 concert series. As Orion considered a commission for this birthday season, musicians and board alike agreed that Patrick Horn was the composer to approach, and we were thrilled when he agreed to write a tango for Orion!

Horn (b. 1970) is a violist, violinist, and teacher as well as a composer. Currently making his home in Thunder Bay, Ontario, where he and his wife enjoy living on the shores of Lake Superior and performing with the Thunder Bay Symphony, Patrick has Chicago and Evanston connections as well. He completed his master's degree in Viola Performance and Pedagogy at Northwestern University and taught at the Merit School of Music and Upbeat Music in Chicago. His prize-winning music has been performed extensively in Canada, the United States, and Europe.

Probably the most obvious influence on his music is that of Argentinian composer Astor Piazzolla. In his notes to *Black Tango*, Patrick wrote: "I became interested in the tango in the mid 1990s because it fused two different styles of music: classical and popular. This music injected a new energy and freshness into melody and rhythm at a time when classical was growing tired of both. It took Astor Piazzolla—a man with a foot in both the classical and popular worlds—to elevate the tango to a serious international musical form. Piazzolla studied composition with Nadia Boulanger in France and followed her advice, as well as his own intuition, to pursue the tango form as his own personal voice." We eagerly anticipate the premiere of Horn's new tango in April.

Not all of our upcoming program choices are by American composers. Strongly in the Russian tradition lies Anton Arensky (1861-1906)—student of Rimsky-Korskov at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, where he later taught Rachmaninoff, Scriabin, and Glière. In addition to his teacher, Arensky was

influenced by Tchaikovsky, but also by other romanticists including Chopin, Liszt, Brahms, Dvorák and Mendelssohn.

These multiple influences are heard in the *Trio in D Minor* (1884) for violin, cello, and piano, one of the more monumental pieces in Arensky's oeuvre, programmed on the March concerts. It pays homage to the piano trio by Mendelssohn in the same key, with its virtuosic piano writing and its soaring string melodies. Some of the first movement's multiple themes have a strong "Russian" character, while others are more suave and "French." The second movement scherzo boasts a "salon" sort of melody in its trio. The third movement is an elegy to cellist Davidov, who had been the director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory during Arensky's student years. The finale begins tempestuously, goes on to a tender second theme, and brings back themes from earlier movements.

An early Beethoven (1770-1827) work will open the March concerts, his *Trio, Op. 1, No. 1* for violin, cello, and piano. This four-movement work—along with the other two piano trios of his Opus 1—are significant, both in their place in the composer's output and in the development of the genre. They were probably begun in 1792, shortly before Beethoven moved to Vienna, and were first performed in 1793 at a soirée at the home of Prince Karl Lichnowsky, where Beethoven had first established himself as a pianist and improviser to be reckoned with. The three trios were published in 1795 as compositional "coming out" pieces—Beethoven's first major publication in Vienna and his first works with opus numbers. They developed the existing piano trio genre by adding a movement, changing the minuet movement to a scherzo (thus faster and more virtuosic), and giving weightier parts to the strings. The *Trio in E-Flat, Op. 1, No. 1*, is full of humor and virtuosic play between the instruments, but it is also a work of substance, with rich thematic contrasts and emotional depth throughout.

Since bassist Rob Kassinger is performing *Benny's Gig* on Orion's April/May concerts, we could not pass up the opportunity to program another work that includes a bass—one of the most beloved of chamber works—the "*Trout*" *Quintet* (1819) by Franz Schubert (1797-1828). The subtitle for the work comes from the theme of the fourth movement variations, based on Schubert's song, *Die Forelle*. Each variation features a different instrument with an appropriate melodic style and material. The *Quintet* owes its creation to a trip that Schubert made to Steyt, a picturesque mountain village, with his favorite singer, baritone Johann Michael Vogl. After a performance of Schubert's songs, Sylvester Paumgartner, the host of the event, commissioned a piano quintet employing the same instrumentation as a popular quintet by Hummel, with the request that it feature the melody of *Die Forelle*.

The other movements, while not using a melody from one of Schubert's 600-some songs, exhibit his characteristic lyri-

cism, along with dance-like sections, drama, playfulness, grace, and harmonic fluidity. They are typical and delicious Schubert: "crying with one eye, laughing with the other."

DIANA SCHMÜCK
Piano



FOOD AND WINE TASTING BENEFIT AT QUINCE RESTAURANT, SUNDAY, APRIL 20 CELEBRATING ORION'S 15TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON

Quince, the acclaimed restaurant at the Homestead in Evanston, will be the site of our 15th Anniversary Season Food and Wine Tasting to benefit The Orion Ensemble, following the Evanston concert at the Music Institute on Sunday, April 20. Executive Chef Mark Hannon will offer three different tasting courses, each paired with a wine specially chosen by Wine Director Joe Ziomek. Additional appetizers will round out our meal. No raffle tickets to buy, no silent auction—just great food and wine in an appealing setting and the chance to honor The Orion Ensemble musicians for 15 years of remarkable music and musicianship.

Tickets for this event are \$75, with further details forthcoming, but make your reservations early, as space will be limited for this very special event. If you'd like to be included on the guest list, please e-mail Shirlene Ward at OrionEnsemble@comcast.net or leave her a voice message at 847-822-3898 with your name and address.

Quince at the Homestead is located at 1625 Hinman Avenue in Evanston, about two blocks from our concert venue at the Music Institute. The restaurant's website (quincerestaurant.net) calls Mark Hannon's cuisine "bold, bright with just a touch of whimsy." Sherman Kaplan of North Shore Magazine (July 2007) has given Quince "20 out of 20," while John Mariani (Esquire Magazine, May 2007) has listed Quince among the "top ten fine dining restaurants in Chicago." We are very excited to honor Orion Ensemble with this fine fare, and we hope to fill every available seat! Don't miss it!

NEW CDS: THE ORION COLLECTION

15 years of beautiful performances—so many memories, so much wonderful music! We wanted to share this fun with you, our audiences; so many of you have been listening to our music all these years.

As you probably know, most of our concerts are recorded by our engineers, Richard Werner and Ed Ingold, and these recordings are mainly for our own listening. They are raw and real and unaltered—untouched recordings of our live performances at different (concert) venues, including the Chicago Cultural Center's Preston Bradley Hall, as well as our series venues, Ganz Hall, Nichols Hall at the Music Institute, Geneva's First Presbyterian Church, and WFMT Studio One.

Late last fall I was reminiscing about 15 years with Orion, thinking about all the great music we had played and how it is not easily accessible even to us. There are lots of tapes and CDs from every single concert—probably hundreds. We sometimes prefer one performance over another—sometimes not necessarily all agreeing as to which one. I was thinking it would be nice to have at least some of our favorite pieces or performances easily available to us—not necessarily in any specific order—sometimes maybe a certain composer, era or a theme.

Well, that's how I got the idea to try to put together a collection of live performances simply unbuckled and unedited—to work on one or two volumes at a time and see what came up. I was inspired by the Heifetz Collection, one of my all-time favorite collections of recordings, and, of course the ultimate collector's item. I thought it would be wonderful if we had an Orion Collection. So, I embarked on a long journey that involves a lot of listening and exploring the past. So far we have the first two volumes of our collection, an All Mozart CD and the Orion and Guests CD—I can't make any promises about when and what the future discs will be, but I am very happy and proud that we can now offer you the experience of our concerts in your own homes or anywhere you'd like to listen. Remember they are live performances, not studio recordings. Yet they are very exciting and I think quite beautiful. You can pick some for you and your friends. I promise you will love them! And please let me know if you have memories of a favorite piece we played or a certain program that you liked, and I'll try to find it. Happy listening!

FLORENTINA RAMNICEANU
Violin

*Please consider a tax-deductible donation to Orion Ensemble.
A contribution envelope is included with this newsletter, for your convenience.
We appreciate your support!*

ORION RECEIVES NEW GRANT FROM THE DONNELLEY FOUNDATION

The Orion Ensemble was privileged to receive a new grant this year from the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation. This award of \$3,000 for general operating expenses will help tremendously to supplement our funding from the Illinois Arts Council, which was reduced by nearly half following the unprecedented budget cuts by the State of Illinois.

Thanks to the writing of board member Roberta Stewart, and the financial documentation of our treasurer, Tracy Shepherd, Orion has not only received this new grant, but continues to receive funding from the Illinois Arts Council and the MacArthur Fund for Arts and Culture.

The Ensemble would also like to express its deep appreciation to all of you who support our series, both through concert attendance and donations. It is thanks to the strong and growing support from you that we are now celebrating our 15th season of great music making. Despite the challenges we face in our world, the rich tapestry that music offers continues to bring us together. Thank you for sharing in this experience.

KATHRYNE PIRTLE
Executive Director

A STEINWAY FOR ORION

In preparing for Orion's move to a new venue in the western suburbs last fall, an opportunity arose that could not be missed. Support group member Mark Foss is the longtime piano tuner at the Orion's new venue, Fox Valley Presbyterian Church. He happens also to own a piano restoration service. In a conversation last summer with another support group member about his excitement regarding the move to the new venue, the subject of his current restoration projects of two wonderful Steinways came up, and before you know it, he was offering them to the Orion for use at their first concert!

Mark tells us: "The 1917 Model 'O' was purchased by a client of mine in Dixon, Illinois in 2003 and was sent to my rebuilding shop for restoration. It was put on hold until my client could raise the money to have it restored. In June of 2007 he decided to sell it, so I purchased it from him. With the help of my two sons Brent and Tim, we finished the restoration in September, just in time for the Orion Ensemble's first program."

Well, it didn't take long to take him up on his offer and then it was up to the ensemble's pianist, Diana Schmück, to give the instrument the "TEST." She was obviously impressed, as

the Model O was delivered in time for the first performance on Sept. 5, to the delight of the ensemble and audience.

Steinway offers a few facts about the pianos that Mark restored:

In 1902, the Model O was first produced by the Steinway & Sons New York factory and introduced to the American consumer market as the "Miniature" Steinway grand piano. It was the Model O that was the first Steinway grand piano to feature the classic Steinway case design known as Sketch 380 Sheraton (squared off, spade-shaped legs) designed by Eugene F. Ayuso, now the standard case design for all Steinway grand models.

When the Model O grand was a brand new scale, it reflected several major new technical innovations with its unprecedented incorporation of 26 notes in the bass section. Examination of early Model O grands reveals that Henry Ziegler who designed this model conducted many experiments and made several adjustments in features and layout.

As mentioned, Henry Ziegler (1857 - 1930) designed and invented the Model O. He also designed and invented the Models M (1912) and L (1923), both of which are based on the original Model O design and scale. The Model M (5'7") is a slightly shorter version of the Model O. The Model L is essentially the same scale as the Model O but with a square tail, rather than round. The Model S (5'11"), which was introduced in 1936, is also based on the Model O design and scale.

In 1906, the Model O bass bridge was changed from straight to curved, and the plate was reconfigured to accommodate adjustable rear duplex scales. In 1914, the length of the Model O was increased slightly by 1/2" from 5'10" to 5'10-1/2". On November 7, 1924, the last of these historic Model O grands were produced in New York. In 2006, the Steinway & Sons New York factory announced that it would return to the production of the original fully developed version of the Model O grand with its characteristic round tail, curved bass bridge, and rear duplex scales.

The piano that is being used for the Orion concerts is a restored 1917 Steinway "O" with a completely restored modern German (Renner) action. This vintage Steinway is a much sought after piano for restoration by piano rebuilders because of its clear, bell-like sound.

The Orion Ensemble thanks Mark Foss for his generous donation of the use of his wonderfully restored Steinway and for providing an opportunity for our audiences to hear this outstanding instrument during the 2007-08 season.

SUE DIXON
Board Member



Linea Stein and Florentina Ramniceanu

ONCE IN A LIFETIME

This fall, Orion virtuoso violinist Florentina Ramniceanu found herself in an atypical role for a violinist: onstage performing an aria opposite David Daniels, who is according to some critics the world's greatest countertenor, in the Lyric Opera's fall production of *Julius Caesar*.

Florentina has played onstage in Lyric productions in the past, but this time was different. The role involved playing two arias, one with a group of musicians in an aria sung by Cleopatra, and another a duet with Caesar—which was not only extremely difficult, but required playing intricate passages while moving about the stage.

"The hardest part for me was the staging, and responding to whatever he [Daniels, who played Caesar] was doing," she says. "The process was extremely demanding. As a violinist, you don't jump and skip and walk and do all these things while playing serious music from memory."

As it turns out, playing the difficult violin solo passages while moving to set choreography was a first for this production; Florentina later learned that when the production was previously done in Paris, the onstage violinist only moved around during the tutti parts where the orchestra was covering the violin part.

"So literally, I am the only person in the world who has done this," says Florentina.

The aria with Caesar was a highlight of the production, and Florentina was even mentioned in the *Chicago Tribune* review. "When he sang his ornate *Se in fiorito* in tandem with the solo violin of Florentina Ramniceanu, he all but charmed the birds from the branches," wrote John von Rhein. The February issue of *Opera News* also lauded her playing: "...David Daniels' exquisitely shaped *Aure, deh, perpieta* was the vocal highlight of the evening, and his duet with violin (charmingly played onstage by Florentina Ramniceanu) in *Se in fiorito* was enchanting in its filigreed grace."

Aside from pulling off each performance flawlessly, Florentina's greatest memory is the unique experience itself. "I enjoyed feeling like an opera singer, which is very different than our performing," she said. "The costume change, memorizing everything, running around backstage to your next entrance and remembering what to play next...this is something singers do all the time. I have a different respect for them now."

"This was truly an experience of a lifetime, a tremendous challenge, but also a great experience," she says. "A violinist becomes a lead opera singer for a few minutes: that doesn't really happen."

Orion's Judy Stone also played onstage during the opera, but one might not have recognized her—her costume required a moustache!

15TH ANNIVERSARY ORION T-SHIRTS AND TOTE BAGS

To celebrate Orion Ensemble's 15th Anniversary, new t-shirts and canvas tote bags are now available for purchase. They feature the wonderful Orion artwork on this year's brochure created by board member, graphic artist Joe Taylor. The company "Infectious Tees" has printed the shirts and canvas bags with turquoise-colored eco-friendly ink on white material. They are beautiful! Each sells for \$15 and can be ordered through the enclosed insert or purchased at our upcoming concerts. We hope you will enjoy them.

THE PART YOU PLAY

If you are reading this newsletter, music probably plays an important role in your life. Once upon a time, music was something to occupy the rich, inspire reverence in church, or entertain the ordinary folk on weekends. Thanks to recording technology, music is ubiquitous these days, on televisions and iPods, in movies and some retail stores—thankfully no longer in elevators. And we have access not only to the music of our own time, but to the music of the past and from around the world. Certainly public education today gives music study short shrift, but after school and after work, we have no lack of musical choices and opportunities.

All this bounty has a downside, though, in its impact on real live musicians, and the often more lengthy and complex repertoire they play. Music that can serve a commercial purpose (sometimes literally) gets played widely. But most of the other music, especially the kind that may require some time and attention until you know it well, isn't common at all. A modern equivalent to the rich patrons of Haydn's day and the churches of Bach's day who commissioned and presented the best music of their time is rather rare. In any case, there aren't enough of them to sustain the level of music making that makes us marvel at what a human being can create.

So this is where you and I come in. The Orion Ensemble makes music that causes me to marvel. Yet from year to year it is never certain whether or how much they will be paid for the tremendous concerts they present to us. (I hope it goes without saying that this is distressing.) By supporting them, in coming to their concerts and in making donations, you are making possible something very special. And I for one, am very grateful, because it means I can go on marveling at these amazing musicians and their music. Thank you, and keep it up!

SHIRLENE WARD, CHAIR
2007-08 Orion Ensemble Board



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