

ECMTA Notes

From the Chairman of the European Chamber Music Teachers Association

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It is both a pleasure and an honor to inaugurate this tribune devoted to the activities of ECMTA members ; many thanks to Carsten Dürer and Ensemble Magazin, official partner of the ECMTA, for giving us this opportunity. Founded in 2007, the association now unites 32 institutional members from 16 countries, including Russia, as well as individual members. Our next meeting, in Gdansk May 28-30 2010, will be an opportunity for colleagues across Europe to get to know each other and to share ideas and information; like previous meetings in Jyväskylä, Vilnius, and Mannheim, the weekend will feature member masterclasses, project presentations, student and faculty concerts, and a round-table discussion on the topic « Festivals and pedagogy, striking the right balance. »

This first tribune will present three projects that give an idea of the kind of creativity, dedication, and diversity that ECMTA members are involved in. Each project in its own way recognizes chamber music as a gateway to personal, professional, and artistic development while promoting a high level of intercultural dialogue. In future reports, I expect to be returning to these and other projects to speak about them in more detail.

For a long time, the teaching of chamber music, especially to younger music students, has not received the same kind of pedagogical attention as instrumental pedagogy. We are glad that this is changing. Since 2005, our colleagues in Riga, under the impulse of the “We Play Music with Friends” Foundation directed by Gunta Melbarde, have been organizing in collaboration with the Jazepa Medina 1.Music School an innovative and highly successful teacher training workshop focusing on the pedagogy of chamber music (more about a similar workshop initiated in France in a future article). This year’s workshop brought together 40 teachers and student ensembles from 8 different schools for incredibly intense three days for lectures, lessons, group teaching and discussion sessions, and masterclasses.

“We Play Music With Friends” was founded in order to promote the study of chamber music in both in Latvia and abroad, and most importantly included the continuing education of teachers among its missions. The founding members and present supporters are teachers directly concerned with the theoretical and practical questions of chamber music pedagogy, particularly as directed to children. Since the beginning, many teachers were actively solicited for proposals in order to adapt the workshops to their interests and needs; according to the topics and focus chosen for each session, 4-5 guest professors are then invited to address the workshop.

The workshops always take place the first weekend of January, at the end of the winter break, so that student groups have had the fall to prepare some works and the teachers will have dealt already with problems and issues to be addressed in the workshop. Each day there is a theoretical lecture given by an invited professor, dealing with contemporary music, new repertoire or other subjects; an *open class* to demonstrate aspects of teaching, with the participation of student ensembles; individual lessons with invited professors for teachers accompanied by their student ensembles. Teachers come to listen to each other’s lessons, and debate and discussion is encouraged in all of the sessions. The weekend is punctuated with coffee breaks and meals during which debate continues. And since performing is part of learning, there is also a teacher’s concert the second day and a student concert at a final gala (in spite of the 9-hour days, there is even some time to attend the opera or Philharmonic on the first evening). These workshops could serve as a model to any community of teachers wishing who wish to create a dynamic spirit of regeneration and inspiration in their work.

Another project, with a long and successful history is the International Students’ Chamber Music

Festival, this year hosted by the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik Stuttgart April 20 – 21st. Originally a piano trio competition in Estonia, the project became a Baltic countries chamber music festival in 1975. During the 1990s, this festival included partners in Finland, Germany, and Sweden, and from 1995 the festival came to include masterclasses, as well. This year's festival will include performances and masterclasses with both student ensembles and professors from the music academies in Tallinn, Riga, Vilnius, Oslo, and Lausanne, with each ensemble preparing one work from the standard repertoire and one work of contemporary music. An opening concert will feature the *City Brass Stuttgart*, an ensemble of former students and professors of the Hochschule in Stuttgart, and every evening will present student groups in concert as well; for the final concert, students selected from all six participating schools will perform the Beethoven Septet together.

Three fundamental characteristics seem to guarantee the success of this event. The first is that it focuses on the non-competitive aspect of the encounter: the goal is to allow students “to enrich their knowledge through masterclasses, to exchange opinions with colleagues and musicians from other countries”, to learn about the host institutions culture through informal activities, to make new friends, and to “show their talent in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.” The practice of chamber music is central to the experience, since the express purpose is to experience the “shared joy of playing together in an ensemble.” The second characteristic is the complete integration of pedagogical activity with teachers from all partner institutions. The students work with all of the different teachers, and can thus see similar problems through different perspectives; the teachers also have an opportunity to meet and learn from each other and from each other's students. The third is that the host country changes each time: this means that participation in the festival is continually opening windows and building bridges on personal, institutional, and national levels. The ongoing success of this festival is a tribute to the commitment of all concerned to benefit from the values of chamber music practice to encourage intercultural cooperation and deeper artistic development of both students and teachers.

A final project, the *Ajassa 2010 ! (In Time 2010 !)* festival was organized by our colleagues at the Metropolia University of Applied Science in Helsinki in March. Founded already about ten years ago as the festival *Chamber Music of Our Time*, the festival was renamed this year as its direction was taken over by Professor Keijo Aho. Bringing together about 100 performers – teachers, students and former students of Metropolia - this innovative festival focuses primarily on contemporary music and includes a composer in residence. But the festival also has a cross-over esthetic, and includes modern jazz, improvisation, performances for children, multimedia and interdisciplinary presentations. The program included works by guest composer Anton Safronov, Baric, Pietilä, Toikka, Puro, Vores, Bahk, Alain Weber, Cage, Silvestrini, Räisänen, Kagel, Hartley, but also Schubert, Mozart and Poulenc. But the basic idea goes beyond simply programming new music: the project seeks to find ways to make contemporary chamber music practice part of the normal artistic life of new generations of musicians.

In order to achieve this goal, much of this ambitious programming was prepared at an intensive eight-day workshop in a remote and beautiful location in Lapland in October 2009: this process guarantees that preparation will not be superficial, and that students will get the most out of their contact with new works and interpretive techniques. Room and board are paid for by the university, the students are thus assured total access and worry-free immersion in musical activity. This year about 35 students and three teachers worked an average of 6 hours a day in ensemble rehearsals, with evenings for individual practice and social events (including the inevitable sauna). The organization of a workshop in this spectacular natural setting also provides a link to Finnish cultural traditions, of great importance for many Finnish painters and composers.

But the students are also encouraged to create their own personal modes of presentation. In “ProfileConcerts,” participants may devise multi-media or interdisciplinary “happenings” that place their repertoire in an unexpected artistic environment, frequently calling on dancers and video art to dramatically transform the traditional concert format. Most students are encouraged to experiment with different forms of improvisation, both structured and free. A-Further, all participants are also encouraged to elaborate themes for the programs, and teachers work with them in order to choose

appropriate repertoire. Representative of the open spirit of the project, festival concerts are staged not only at the hall of the Helsinki Conservatory, but also in several art galleries and even in a restaurant. A photo exhibition of Marko Puro's splendid pictures of the workshop in Lappland ran parallel to the festival.

Dr Evan Rothstein, Chairman, ECMTA

Winter Masterclasses for chamber music pedagogy in Riga. Information on the website of the "We Play With Friends Foundation" : www.kamerfest.lv and contact : weplay@inbox.lv

International Students' Chamber Music Festival. Contact : caterina.mrenes@mh-stuttgart.de

Ajassa 2010 ! and information on future festivals (most information in Finnish only): www.ajassafestival.eu and the Facebook group "Ajassa 2010." For information in German or English : keijo.aho@kolumbus.fi