

MUSIC FOR THE LOVE OF IT

JUNE 2003

PLAYING WITH PURPOSE:

KNEISEL HALL'S ADULT CHAMBER MUSIC INSTITUTE

by Abram Loft



The Kneisel Quartet, c. 1900

Kneisel Hall is a music-study center established in 1902 by Frank Kneisel, first concertmaster of the Boston Symphony, on his estate in Blue Hill, Maine. Revitalized in 1953, it has served since then

as a chamber music summer school for young professionals from America and abroad. Kneisel Hall's Adult Chamber Music Institute is a week-long workshop for amateur chamber music enthusiasts to refine their playing technique and sharpen their musical insights.

It was around 1965, when I was with the Fine Arts Quartet. Victor Babin, director of the Cleveland Institute of Music, asked us to visit the Institute for a number of lecture and concert sessions. On one of these occasions, Arthur Loesser invited us to his home for dinner. Joining us that evening was Jerome Gross, surgeon and prime mover in the Cleveland musical scene. Jerry had

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FIDDLING AROUND WITH MY SOCIAL SECURITY

by Barbara Clere Klain

As retirement looms, I've been taking stock of my social security. Not Social Security with a capital "S." Other than showing up at work each day, there's not much I can do about that. No, I'm more concerned about my social security — the assets that will make me popular and in demand no matter how old I get. When the daily commute to work is history, I don't want to sit at home watching TV and wishing I were behind a desk again.

I want to be needed, courted, and loved. I want to play the viola.

What's the difference between a violin and a viola?

The viola burns longer.

The viola holds more beer.

You can tune the violin.

Besides providing a little noodling accompaniment in pieces that might be just a tad less wonderful if the noodling were left

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THE PING-PONG OF CHAMBER MUSIC

by Nancy Garniez

A certain number of people will testify to the liberating effect of a metaphysical approach to playing golf, tennis, the piano, and a few other things. Judging from the way I talk about the connection between musical substance and the mechanics of playing an instrument, you might suspect that I was a practitioner of Zen. However liberated I may be in relation to music, I confess that I have never been able to get beyond the need for utter predictability in another diverting sport: Ping-Pong. Given my complete ineptitude with ball and paddle, my version of a perfect game is when the ball bounces back and forth, *gnip-gnop, gnip-gnop*, in comforting rhythmic regularity. Having once experienced my unsporting version of the game, a person inevitably smiles weakly while declining the invitation to join me. I long ago gave up looking for partners.

In my work with adult amateurs I am struck by the need of many of them to approach chamber music in precisely that way, that is, with a reliable but basically uninteresting *gnip-gnop*. There is never a fast serve, a spin on a return, or a trace of finesse that might keep the other players on their toes. How can one compare chamber music to a serious game of Ping-Pong, since there obviously has to be a reliable beat in music? I am not suggesting that a reliable beat is a bad idea. But I am indeed suggesting that it is not enough.



In order to savor the full delight of this most sophisticated parlor game one must distinguish between inner rhythmic motivation and metronomic beats. Imagine four friends playing a Mozart quartet. If everyone methodically counts "one, two, three, four" with precisely interchangeable combinations of whole notes, half notes, quarter notes, eighth notes, sixteenth

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THE IN BOX

THE HEALING POWER OF MUSIC

Editor,

My late husband was an opera singer. One year whilst visiting friends in Florida at Christmas time, he was asked to give an impromptu concert at the retirement home where they both worked. His audience were in the age range of 70-100, many with physical disabilities. After he had concluded his programme of old ballads, light opera and seasonal favourites, a lady in a wheelchair went over to him. She simply said, "Thank you so much. That was beautiful." As she left, several staff members rushed over to him to ask what the lady had said. He told them. One of the nurses hugged him and said, "Lois has not spoken one word since her husband died 20 years ago."

Barbara Manning
Eastbourne, UK

HEARING LOSS

Editor,

Thanks for the April issue of your newsletter. I really enjoyed it. Thanks for writing your article of ensemble tips for people with hearing loss. I suppose you saw Bob Goldstein's "riff," as he called it, on personal hearing loss in the last *Chamber Musician* (www.cmnc.com)? Time is definitely marching on for all of us!

Elizabeth Morrison
Pacifica, CA, USA

JAZZ BY EAR

Editor:

I loved "Jazz by Ear" in the April issue. I'll be 80 this year and I'd love to try such a session. I learned a little jazz in Indianapolis when I was about 20, and loved it.

Phyllis Head
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

COMPUTER AND MUSIC KEYBOARD

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IN PRAISE OF THE AIR-GUITAR

by Jonathan Montpetit

It is the opinion of some that understanding sound color is fundamental to any real appreciation of music. Others see time and rhythm as the keys able to unlock the mysteries of harmony. Still others devote their lives to studying the evolution of instrumentation, the history of musical theory, the biographies of musicians. But the real music lover knows there is only way to appreciate music: playing air-guitar.

The art of playing guitar, without a guitar, is a skill often overlooked by Julliard assessors. Indeed air-musicianship in general has had a long, slow and arduous climb into the domain of respectability, a journey that is still far from over. The reasons for this are complex: to do with social class, a little known Presidential ban, quantum mechanics and the fact that, to the bystander, the air-musician appears to be having some sort of epileptic fit. Suffice it to say Ken Burns has yet to offer us a definitive history of the genre.

And yet air-musicians face the same problems as musicians of more tangible instruments. Take the challenge of finding the right instrument for example. It is said that Beethoven, while he still performed, was notoriously difficult when it came to choosing his pianos, requiring the keyboard with the greatest range in Europe. The air-musician should be no less demanding. A coffee table/Steinway Baby Grand is simply too small to really get into Chopin's *Piano Concerto No. 1*: for that you need nothing less than the dining room table, supper be damned. Finding a proper air-guitar is even more difficult. Since Robin Williams strummed his way through "Dude Looks a Like Lady" in *Mrs. Doubtfire*, people often look to the broom as the preferred choice. But here, once again, Hollywood is not in tune with the reality of the air-musician's world. Any seasoned air-guitarist will tell you that it is not the broom but the tennis racket that offers the best air-sound. Here you are looking for something light and preferably with strings loose from years of sitting in your closet. These loose strings are instrumental, so to speak, when it comes to air-guitaring the blues.

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CLEFTOMANIA: HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE ALTO CLEF

by Ruth Cazden

Seven years after taking up violin as a 45-year-old adult I decided to try the viola. I wasn't abandoning the violin; I wanted to be a switch-hitter. So in addition to struggling with basic string techniques, I had the daunting challenge of learning a second clef. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread!

Most viola music is written in alto clef, which violists often call viola clef. I generally refer to it as "that %\$#@* &# clef." I decided to learn the clef without resorting to tricks such as reading the notes as if they were in treble clef, played in third position. (That seemed more difficult than viola clef, or even Greek.) I got a book for beginning violists and started by saying the notes aloud. Then I tried to find them on the viola. The G, D and A strings weren't too hard because they're also found on the violin. I just had to remember that they're one string over. The big problem was the C string; my little violin has no C string!

The next step was to get a book of simple Christmas carols in viola clef. The melodies were familiar and it was easy to know when I played a wrong note or played out of tune. I discovered an additional benefit to starting with familiar tunes: when I became clef-confused, my ears and fingers knew what note to play, even though I couldn't name it.

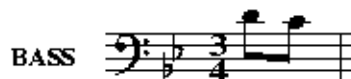
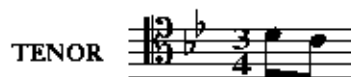
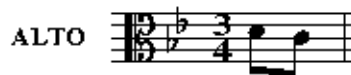
When viola clef became more familiar I began tackling some movements from *The Art of the Fugue*. Having played the violin parts, I knew the melodies and patterns. This made it easier to recognize clef errors. I made a point of doing extra repetitions of passages on the C string because of its unfamiliarity. My goal was to create an automatic and instantaneous link between the printed note and a place on the fingerboard.

While all this was going on, I continued playing and studying violin. To maintain continuity with the newly learned alto clef, I made sure to play some viola every day. I realize now that I should have switched instruments for a few minutes at the end of each practice session. That would have given me a higher degree of comfort today when called on to switch from viola to violin or vice-versa during an evening of chamber music. That still makes me a bit nervous.

After 6 months of struggling with alto clef, I got some good (and tolerant) friends to come over for an evening of viola quintets, with yours truly playing second viola. I expected to have some clef incidents and was not disappointed. As time goes on I continue to have occasional clef lapses, but they happen less frequently. I expected to lapse into treble clef when playing the viola. What I didn't expect was lapsing into viola clef when

playing the violin. That happens as much as it does the other way around. When I have a spate of clef problems while practicing, it's usually a sign of fatigue, signaling that it's time to take a break.

The next clef challenge came when I discovered that editors often put viola passages in treble clef. What confusion! Unfortunately, I get no sympathy from Tom, my better half, who is a fine cellist. He points out that cellists have four clefs: bass clef, tenor clef, treble clef and "trouble clef". (Trouble clef is treble clef an octave down, often found in Dvorak quartets.) The first time I came upon treble clef in viola music I froze. My mind went blank and my fingers stopped dead in their tracks.



To teach myself treble clef on the viola I went back to the simple Christmas carols, this time written in treble clef, and started playing them on the viola. In the beginning I found it helpful to say the notes aloud, just as I had done when beginning to learn viola clef. Then I turned to the *Art of the Fugue* again, this time playing the second violin parts on the viola. One night I got ambitious and tried to play the Violin Concertato II part from the Corelli *Christmas Concerto* (which I know quite well) on the viola. It was slow going, but I could do it.

Switching back and forth between clefs in the same piece is still difficult, especially when sight reading. I have the Vivaldi *Cello Sonatas* transcribed for viola. Primrose edited them and used lots of treble clef, even in places where it's not absolutely necessary. I read from them often to get more experience in clef switching.

Although it's getting better, I still have instances of clef confusion. Just three weeks ago my quartet was reading through Beethoven's Opus 18, #3. I was playing second violin. After thirteen bars of whole note accompaniment the second violin gets the melody, starting on an A. Unfortunately, I mistook it for an alto clef B. When fingered on the violin, an alto clef B is a violin F#. My colleagues looked at me strangely as I came in a minor third below the correct pitch. Uh, excuse me, could we start over again? I just had a clef incident!

Violinist and violist Ruth Cazden works as a consultant to the insurance industry. She lives in El Cerrito, California.

AIR-GUITAR

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Alas, only the true virtuosos are able to rely simply on their bare hands to create the instruments of their choice. Where the rookie air-musician might unwittingly turn a trumpet into a French horn, the virtuoso not only has the trumpet in his preferred color, but his spit-valve is well oiled as well.

There must be something peculiar about music as an art form if it compels people to take air-musicianship to the point that there are actually national and international air-guitaring competitions. After all, how often do you see someone punching the keys of an air-typewriter while leafing through *The Great Gatsby*.

So what is behind these musical Don Quixotes' favourite songs and albums taking the place of knights dressed up as windmills? Quite simply, it is admiration stripped of any pretense. When you pick up an air-guitar you are no longer concerned about the gap between your ability and Hendrix's, you are concerned rather with Hendrix and how good Hendrix sounds at that particular moment. By recalling the physical act that created the piece of music in the first place, the air-musician is attempting to identify with the talent of the musician; it is the search to understand the genius behind a piece that commands the attention, so much so that simply listening is no longer enough.

The one thing the air-musician is not concerned with is how he looks to other people. And that's how it should be. Developing an intimate and unique method of engaging the music that is most meaningful to you is the only way of ensuring that your response is just that, your response, and not the product of mainstream fashion, or worse, some sense of your shortcomings as a musician. It's important to remember that the music you love is not the measure of your success as a musician, but rather a catalyst to your desire to succeed.

Deny it to your psychologist all you want, just remember there is no shame in taking out that old tennis racket to blast your through "Stairway to Heaven."

Jonathan Montpetit is a poet, writer and air-guitar virtuoso. He can be contacted at jonathan_montpetit@hotmail.com

PING-PONG

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notes, *plus* trills and other ornaments, a total of six different rhythmic levels, the group will be making *gnip-gnop*, not music.

Permit me to offer a sportscaster's view of what I imagine Wolfgang Amadeus had in mind. Player #1/North favors a slow spin on the serve, especially when aimed at player #3/South, who is known to be very bad at returning slow spin serves. #3/South is fast

paced, quick on the uptake, impatient with anything that might slow down the outer pace of the game. It's over to #2/North to place a backhand shot, deceptively prepared with windup and flourish, to lop ever so gently just over the net. #4/South refuses to fall for the trick. Leaning forward, he anticipates the move, snatches away the initiative, and returns the ball before it has a chance to bounce.



To translate this into the dynamic language of chamber music: #1/North is probably a cellist, serving up a whole note G with a gorgeous vibrato. #3/South runs sixteenth notes up and down the scale after a sixteenth rest. #2/North in the meantime has flourished the bow as if to deliver a long note, but instead enters with a trill and plays two full-bow half-notes with very rapid bow speed, clearly designed to addle the opposition. #4/North, momentarily in command of the situation, calmly paces out four super stable quarter notes.

This is only the first measure! And we haven't even considered the intricacies of pitch. (#1/North insists on an F# while #2/South has to produce a convincing F-natural just a half-beat later. Here comes #3/North with G's on beats 2 and 3, that will surely lead #4/South to misjudge G# on the last eighth-note of the bar!) Imagine the excitement still to come in this subtle game of delivering and countering; joining and resisting; changing position with feints, false starts, loss of balance (how better to describe a rest on a downbeat?). It calls for constantly changing offensive and defensive strategies. Occasional train wrecks only intensify the fun. I even advocate placing bets on how far the group will get before the first train wreck.

Voilà! We have successfully transformed *gnip-gnop* into an elaborate game. Like every good game it has variations so multiple that only the most committed *gnip-gnop*-ist could possibly give up on its pleasures.

Just as the point of Ping-Pong is not to find satisfaction in the reliable clicking of *gnips* and *gnops*, I firmly believe that the point of chamber music is lost the moment that units of time become utterly predictable. One dedicated amateur expressed it well when he asked: "You mean that the point is not to report for duty in the next bar?"

Pianist Nancy Garniez directs the Alaria Chamber Music Workshop in New York City, and writes often for us.

FIDDLING AROUND continued from page 1

out, the viola doesn't do much. Everyone enjoys the romantic violins and is touched by the plaintive oboe. Who doesn't love a rousing trumpet solo? But you hardly ever hear someone say, "Wow, that was some hot viola section!"

Extroverts by nature, not too many musicians are content to play harmony all the time. So there aren't many viola players. But conductors figure that if the composer bothered to write a viola part, there had better be someone playing it. So viola players are cherished, courted, and bribed. They are invited out a lot, to rehearsals and performances — and, occasionally, even to dinner. They have social security.

When I was in high school, I played the oboe in the community orchestra, a modest group of amateurs who loved music enough to play it badly rather than not at all. One of the members who actually knew what she was doing was Mrs. Warshawsky, our entire viola section. She was from Europe and older than Beethoven. She walked with a cane and squinted at the music through thick glasses, but she played a fine viola. She didn't drive a car, but someone (frequently my father) was always available to get her to rehearsals and home again. If she and her ride were late to rehearsal, the conductor would stand at the podium and demand, "Where's Esther? Is Esther coming? Who's bringing Esther?" The baton didn't come down until Mrs. Warshawsky was seated, tuned, and ready to go.

When I was in college, there were no viola students in the school, so three viola players were recruited from the community to sit in with the orchestra. They weren't paid; they did it because they loved music. They were all over 60.

One of them, Sol Spiegel, had never married. He was retired and alone. Alone, but not lonely, because five

nights a week he played his viola in a different orchestra with arthritic hands that refused to quit. He always got a warm welcome from our conductor. When things were not going well, the conductor would yell at the students ("You should practice more, spend less time on your hairs!"); but he always treated Sol and the other members of the viola section with deference, no doubt because he wanted them to show up the following week.

Once I was married, raising a family, finishing course work for my degree, and working, I had little time to practice the oboe. Oboists, like runners, need to stay in condition. If you don't play every day, it becomes more and more difficult to summon up the wind and endurance required to play a long phrase without getting spots in front of your eyes.

The last time I played the oboe in public was with a chamber group at the university. We performed a Mozart octet, a piece for eight wind instruments. I did not play first chair; that is, I did not have the most visible part. But even as second oboe, I had a lot to do. With only eight tooters tootling, every tootle counts. During rehearsal, there's a lot of stopping and starting, and I had plenty of chance to catch my breath. Although I was out of shape, I was able to "cut it," as the kids say.

But during the performance, there was no opportunity to come up for air. Before the first movement was over, I knew I was in trouble. I felt as though I were going to pass out. By the time we began the last movement, I was sure that every phrase would be my last. I vowed that if I could just finish the performance without embarrassing myself, I would never play the oboe in public again. Somehow I made it through. And although many promises made in foxholes are soon broken, I have kept this one.

But I missed playing. I missed the music. I missed the jokes:

*How do you get two oboes to play in tune?
Shoot one of them.*

One night a few years ago, I got a phone call from the conductor of the local community orchestra. He was wondering if I was going to be coming to rehearsals for the next season. I told him my days playing the oboe were over.

He asked, "Would you like to learn to play the viola?" When I said no, he said, "Well, we need violas. If you'd like to learn, I'd teach you myself." I laughed him off with a "No, thanks." But I couldn't get his offer out of my mind.

I mulled it over for a few years and, after losing both my parents within a short time, I realized that life is not

continues on next page

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SOCIAL SECURITY **continued from page 5**

forever. I located a viola teacher (not the desperate conductor) and rented a fiddle. So far, things are going as well as can be expected. But with my music background I figure that, before I get too old to know my brass from my oboe, I will learn to tame the squeaks, squawks, and squeals that I make now. Eventually I will play well enough to make music with an amateur community orchestra. I will be needed, welcomed, and appreciated. And when I get too old to drive, someone else will see to it that I get to rehearsal.

Every dollar I spend now on viola lessons is an investment in my future. Every hour I practice is another deposit into my social security account.

*What do you do with a dead viola player?
Move her back a desk.*

I hope they'll do that for me.

Violist Barbara Clere Klain lives in Lowell, MA. She works as a technical writer.

KNEISEL HALL **continued from page 1**

brought his Stradivarius with him and asked whether he might play for us. "All right," I quipped, "if you watch me operate." Thereupon, with Arthur at the keyboard, Jerry launched into a marvelous performance of Fauré's Sonata in A Major. At the last note of the work, I rose to applaud and said, "You can't watch me operate!" Once again, I had learned not to underestimate the prowess of a dedicated amateur.

During my years of coaching chamber music, I have heard men and women of varied callings play with a technical mastery that could win the admiration of the seasoned professional. Sometimes, though, there can be a downside to this competence. The fascination of the rich chamber repertoire can draw the aficionado into a habit of reading through a great number of works, year after year, hardly pausing to plumb the depths of any one composition. That's a mistake. The music we so admire yields its subtle shades of meaning, mood, and sensibility only upon careful and repeated study. The repetition, whether of a phrase, a section, or a movement, must be discerning and inquisitive, not simply an exercise of the fingers. Dexterity, accurate rhythm and intonation, control of keyboard, bow, reed or embouchure — all are in vain if the mind of the player is not constantly doing its job.

I'm happy to be one of the coaches at Kneisel Hall's Adult Chamber Music Institute, precisely because of the emphasis there on perceptive music-making. The director of the session, cellist George Sopkin, sets the

tone of the event: a concentration on a limited number of works, with each ensemble coming to grips with an assigned composition. This time around (the week of August 11-17), the focus will be on Haydn's quartets, Op. 33 and Op. 50, and on Mozart's six quartets dedicated to the older master. Every morning, a given ensemble will play for an hour under the observation of that day's coach, whether George, violist Scott Woolweaver, pianist Jeannette Koekkoek, or myself, and have the rest of the time before lunch to apply the suggestions we have offered. Our advice is always open to question and discussion by the ensemble members, as is the give-and-take of opinion among the players.

Ensemble master-classes (the participant groups playing for each other and the assembled coaches) and discussion sessions are scheduled for the afternoon hours. In one talk, George and I will discuss the interaction between Haydn and Mozart in their quartet output. Another will be a duo discussion between Arnold Steinhardt, first violin of the Guarneri Quartet and myself, comparing our individual perspectives and experiences on a career in chamber music. Evening recitals will include one by Scott Woolweaver and Jeannette Koekkoek; and another by Arnold Steinhardt and Seymour Lipkin, the renowned pianist, teacher, and director of Kneisel Hall.

Eight ensembles of strings, alone or with piano, pre-formed or assembled by George from among the applicant musicians, make up the workshop roster. A select few students from the annual summer school conducted at Kneisel Hall will stay on to fill out the ranks of the adult ensembles. The high caliber of these musicians will be evident from a concert given by them the first evening of the workshop. George will try to have one of these assistants in each group (other than the pre-formed ones), to add to the collective know-how of the ensemble. On the last day of the workshop, there will be a concert by all ensembles willing to take part.

Kneisel Hall is on the Maine coast near Acadia National Park. The facilities include an old, wood-paneled concert hall, a modern Chamber Music Center building, rehearsal rooms and woodland studios, extensive music library, dining hall, and dormitories. Motels, restaurants and shops are near at hand. The food is robust and tasty, including a traditional lobster picnic.

For more information, contact: George Sopkin, 748 Newbury Neck Road, Surry, ME 04684, (207) 667-4636 Fax: (207) 667-7338, sopkin@hypernet.com.

Violinist Abram Loft played 25 years with the Fine Arts Quartet and then was head of the string department and professor of chamber music at the Eastman School of Music. The most recent of his many books is How to Succeed in an Ensemble (Amadeus Press, ISBN 1-57467-078-6, © 2003).

Playing with the Professionals

is the blanket title for three new workshops to be held in the Czech Republic, each slightly different to the other, offered by **Intermusica**. They are probably unique in that top professionals with considerable pedagogic experience play WITH amateur musicians throughout. General information is available on www.intermusica.org.

Four ensembles—a new approach is organized by VBMA (Verein Bergsträsser Musikseminare) and features the Martinu Quartet of Prague. Contact: candy.boller@t-online.de or Fax +49 8106 232719.



Castle Lnare, West Bohemia

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workshops which are for music students rather than amateur musicians: the ***String Quartet Course*** with the Wihan Quartet, held in Mahler's birthplace in South Bohemia and the ***Summer Master Courses*** of Maria Hixova, held in Prague. Contact pipergeo@pt.lu or Fax +352 223585.



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MUSIC FOR THE LOVE OF IT

JUNE 2003

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