

MUSIC FOR THE LOVE OF IT

JULY 2008

Finding Fellow Amateur Musicians

by Gladys Scheffrin-Falk

On a June evening at the music building of Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, TN, a child of no more than seven marched into the reception area carrying her violin, a look of pride on her rounded cheeks, her chin thrust forward with determination. She was followed by a stream of musicians of all ages, all carrying stringed instruments. Among them were my husband and I, who had driven from North Carolina to join in a three-day weekend workshop (see www.chambermusicweekend.org.)

As an amateur violinist, I have often classified myself with Sherlock Holmes, playing alone in my bedroom when the spirit moved me, once or twice a week. Now in my seventies, I had decided to attempt chamber music. Like that seven-year-old, I was determined to do my best.

My first chamber music assignment came on the second day, after a day playing in the orchestra. I was given the first violin part of a quartet. I felt as though I had been tossed into deep

water to sink or swim. I concentrated, grateful that the viola player had given us a strong, steady beat. When I lost my place, the second violin player would point in my part to where I was supposed to be playing. Sometimes I succeeded, sometimes not, and eventually I traded chairs with the second violin. All in all, though, it was a satisfactory first experience.

The second group I was thrown in with seemed less experienced. The sound quality I longed for was quite lacking, and without strong players around me it became harder to keep my own place. But the more I played, the better I got at reading unfamiliar music, and the easier it was to keep up.

Not since my high school days when I played in the All-State Symphony had I devoted so much time to playing. After two days of total immersion in sight reading I felt the violin responding as if it were part of me.

Now I found myself assigned to a larger group—four violins, a viola and a cello. I met a young violinist, now at

her fourth SAU chamber music weekend, outside the rehearsal room. She was suffering from back pain, and I was able to show her a simple stretch that seemed to help. Then, when she took the lead of our group, I felt confident enough to ask her for a stronger beat to help us keep time. We repeated troublesome sections and, oddly enough, began to behave like a coherent ensemble.

To my horror, the group voted to play during the Master Class. Yes, I understood it would augment our learning to be critiqued. But I had suffered from stage fright as a young violinist, and feared that I had not yet overcome it.

At 5:15 the Master Class assembled. My comrades all had their instruments in their hands and seemed eager to play and be critiqued by Ellen Francisco, our ubiquitous director. My violin was still locked in its case. As I watched the performers receiving her encouragement and instruction, her vocalizing and occasional riffs on her

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Ellen Francisco

deep-voiced viola, I was impressed by her ability to create an atmosphere in which they could learn. But then I realized how many people

would be watching me. I was seized with terror, and murmured, "Sorry, I can't play with you."

"Come along," one woman said, "You'll be glad you did." Reluctantly, I opened my case, gripped my violin and followed them into the circle. We played. Here and there I floundered, but recovered. Were we asked to repeat a section? I cannot recall. I remember my violin seemed happy to be making music, and seemed to say, "Keep playing."

The Sabbath fellowship lunch was a Mediterranean feast, the best of our three daily vegetarian meals together. At the table I was able to share recollections with Nancy Rodgers, who had been helpful in two sessions we had together, and Haley Adams, whose husband had played with me.

Later Nancy emailed me: "Meeting others who enjoy playing their instruments as I do was wonderful. I play in a large chamber group at home, but playing in smaller groups with players on my level helped me gain confidence. The Master Class taught me the importance of rhythm versus just aiming to hit the correct note. Wasn't the food incredible?" Margaret

Spencer, another participant, agreed that it had been an amazing weekend: "My violin teacher takes a group of students most years to give them that experience. Who would think you could take a pile of string quartet music, sit down with a bunch of strangers, and make music?"

Next year, when SAU conducts its eleventh annual workshop, some of us former strangers will greet each other as very special friends and sit down to make even better music together.

Gladys Sheffrin-Falk lives in Hendersonville, NC. Her children's book, "Another Celebrated Dancing Bear," (Purple House Press) has won several awards, and was dedicated to her violin teacher.



Gladys Scheffrin-Falk

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The In Box

RTO IN THE NEWS AGAIN

"Why should real musicians—the ones who can actually play their instruments—have all the fun?" asks novelist Alexander McCall Smith in an essay for the *New York Times* op-ed page (March 9, 2008). He then fondly describes the Really Terrible Orchestra of Edinburgh, Scotland, which he co-founded. "My own playing set the standard. I play the bassoon, if not quite the whole bassoon . . ." A documentary film about the RTO, *The Really Terrible Orchestra*, directed by Edward Brooke-Hitching, was selected for the 60th International Edinburgh Film Festival in 2006.

MUSICAL VACATIONS

Like many of our readers, Music for the Love of It's staff and contributors have ambitious plans for musical vacations this summer. Ruth Cazden is returning in June to her beloved *Humboldt Chamber Music Workshop* on California's North Coast, while Elizabeth Morrison will drive south to the *San Diego Chamber Music Workshop*. At the end of July, Janet Telford and her vocal trio will drive up to the *Midsummer Musical Retreat* in Walla Walla, Washington. At the same time, Ted Rust will travel to the Loire Valley of France for *Musique en vacances*. He has been warned that France has scrupulously rid itself of English, German and Italian musical terms, poetically referring to a quarter-note rest as a "soupon" (a sigh). Not to be totally baffled in his chamber music rehearsals, he is now taking biweekly lessons in musical French. He will also spend a week in New Hampshire with old friends at the *Raphael Trio Chamber Music Workshop*. Readers are urged to write us about their own adventures.

Teaching, Learning and Life from a Cellist's Perspective

Rosindust by Cornelia Watkins

reviewed by Elizabeth Morrison

Rosindust: Teaching, Learning and Life from a Cellist's Perspective by Cornelia Watkins. Paperback: 168 pages, Rosindust Publishing, PO BOX 430205 Houston TX 77243, ISBN-13: 978-1604613926, \$28.95



Cornelia Watkins (photo on left) opens a chapter with this passage:

I was particularly fond of one of the younger cellist (at a

summer music program)...She was performing in a recital and had dropped big hints about wanting me to attend. I happened by the hall about fifteen minutes before performance time, and heard halting strains of her piece coming through the door. I went in and found her sitting on stage with her cello looking obviously distraught. Her mother related that a problematic passage kept tripping her up...was there anything I could do to help?

With so little time to work, I simply asked her to say aloud the fingering of the passage that was troubling her. Not surprisingly, she stumbled trying to say the numbers. I had her divide the passage into smaller groups of fingerings, verbalize those, and then add the small groups back together. After a few repetitions for ease, she then said the fingerings in the rhythm of the passage. With that accomplished, she tried the passage again on her cello, and this time she played it flawlessly. After five minutes of work and without touching the cello, she could now play something that had apparently given her weeks of grief! Minutes later at the performance she maneuvered through the passage without a

stumble and was obviously relieved and delighted with her success."

The passage, from a chapter called "The Voice—a Window on the Brain," nicely conveys the tone of this excellent book. In a warm and personal voice, Watkins dispenses innovative advice that can be immediately helpful. What a good idea to say the fingerings! I tried it out on a tricky passage, and lo and behold, my fingers too started to behave.

Although the book derives from essays Watkins originally wrote for her newsletter, it is both cohesive and inclusive. She covers a broad range of issues involved in teaching a string instrument. There are sections on "The Learning Environment," "The Tools" (which include chapters on bow arm, left hand, shifting, intonation and vibrato), "The Music," (interesting chapters on teaching musicianship), "The Freedom to Play" (on tension and preparing for performance) and in conclusion, "The Unification of Ideas."

Chapters generally begin with personal stories like the one above, and proceed through very detailed suggestions. The chapter on practicing includes not less than 21 great practice ideas, with eight ideas for metronome work alone!

The chapters on teaching musicianship are especially revelatory. Watkins encourages teachers to look within and face up to possible lacunae in their own pedagogy. "As a student," she admits, "I was suddenly mystified when a teacher started talking about shaping lines and phrases—the words might have been Hungarian. 'You need to work on your phrasing.' My eyes would glaze over. What did that mean? How could I tell if I was doing

it or not? What would happen to me if I didn't?"

This is charming, and I can relate, but what's good about the chapter is that Watkins goes on to give concrete ways of thinking about phrasing, from interpreting the harmonic progression to analyzing melody and rhythmic structure. She nails how easy it is to focus on concrete issues of playing and pass over more fundamental questions of musicality, wrongly believing that a student "either has it or doesn't," and so nothing can really be done.

The "Unification of Ideas" section is one of the most interesting in the book. Watkins was a performance major who has taught in her own studio all her life. But she chose to attend a conference called Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP), a Wisconsin training program for public school music teachers. She describes the distance she felt from the needs of a school music teacher, and how she came to realize that CMP, which offers a systematic and detailed approach to music instruction, offers a helpful model for all teachers, not just those in a classroom setting. This final section alone makes the book worth reading.

Rosindust is written for cellists and cello teachers, but is so full of ideas for both students and teachers that I recommend it for all string players and, except for the Tools section, for all instrumentalists. Reading her warm anecdotes and absorbing her wealth of specific suggestions, the reader comes away both inspired and grateful.

Cellist Elizabeth Morrison lives in Pacifica, California. Her article, "Beethoven Variations," appeared in our March, 2008 issue.

A Shrine of Music: the National Music Museum

by Avrora Moussorlieva



Can there be anything interesting for the music lover in the middle of the Midwest away from the big urban centers and highways? Somewhere you can bring the family, have fun and learn about music?

“Not a chance!” thought our metropolitan St. Paul family, a historian, a cello player and three young girls, when we visited South Dakota for its natural beauty a couple of years ago. Since then we have returned twice to the sleepy university town of Vermillion in its southeast corner. I had countless times heard the question: “When are we going there again, Mom?”

Vermillion, spread on a bluff overlooking the Missouri river, met us on a cool spring day with empty streets, naked trees and fresh green grass. We went straight to the National Music Museum, housed in a jewel of a building on the University of South Dakota campus. The building was donated for a library in 1910 by the wealthiest man of his time, Andrew Carnegie, who believed dying wealthy to be a disgrace.

Visitors nowadays are welcomed by a courtyard with benches, a miniature Indiana limestone amphitheatre matching the patterns on the façade and a charming fountain with a graceful bronze sculpture (right) of an immigrant violinist and three children.

Inside, a sociable lady cheerfully supplied us with self-guided audio tours and our journey began through the restored rooms

decorated with dark oak, marble revetment and terrazzo floors.

The first level is dedicated to West European stringed and keyboard instruments from the 16th to the 19th Century. They were created to make music as much as to please the eye—elaborate scenes and ornaments and lush varnish kept us long in the rooms. We listened to the sound of about a dozen of them too. I expected my four-years-old twins to be bored but they found themselves in an enchanted world and frequently dashed to some instrument in the other end of the gallery in admiration.

Our favorite instrument there was “The King” cello (photo above) the earliest surviving bass instrument of the violin family by Andrea Amati (ca. 1505-1577), creator of the violin shape, as we know it today. It was bigger than a modern cello and had three strings when it was built around 1538 in Cremona, Italy. When it was included, around 1560, in a set of 38 stringed instruments, ordered for the French

court of King Charles IX, it was painted and gilded with the royal emblems and mottoes in Latin and the letter “K” for “Karolus” (Charles) on the sides and a figural scene on the back. The set was used until it was dispersed in 1789, during the French Revolution. Later “The King” was cut down in size and “modernized” — wood was removed down the center, leaving the woman, representing “Justice” in the painting on the back without a waist or left arm.

“The King” is part of a collection of 145 Italian string instruments and bows by Stradivari, Guarneri, Amati and others. In 2005 it was borrowed by the city of Cremona for the celebration of the 500-year-old tradition of great violin making for which it is still known.

The keyboard gallery drew our attention toward the development of the mechanisms from the earliest surviving piano by a Portuguese maker (Manuel Antunes, 1767) and the earliest French grand piano (Louis Bas, 1781) to more familiar examples.

The non-Western instruments are represented by numerous Asian instruments full of symbolic meaning, and a fascinating collection of African percussion instruments some used for music, others as a sort of telegraph system. I liked best the giant bird-like instrument hanging from the ceiling (photo on facing page, top). It had to be carried by several people in an African ceremony.

The American and European instruments were full of surprises too. There were





miniature pocket violins, used by dance teachers; all kinds of colorful folk instruments; a collection of strange sound-producing devices; and the custom-made instruments of stars.

You learn from the museum catalogue that one man's passion started it all. The collection of Arne B. Larson (1904-1988) became the base of the museum. With more than 2,500 instruments and an extensive supporting library of related musical materials and recordings, it was the largest private collection when it was donated to the State of South Dakota in 1979. With substantial holdings in American, European, and non-Western instruments, many strange looking, obscure or with stunning beauty, it reflected the curiosity and generosity of its donor. To this contribution he added the Larson farm in Minnesota, owned by his family for more than a century.

Arne Larson started playing as a little boy in Hanska, MN, in his church and his family orchestra, and later organized his own band. He became a music teacher and a successful conductor. He started his collection when Congress lowered the pitch standard in the 1920s and made many instruments obsolete. To support his hobby, he tuned pianos and rarely paid more than a couple of dollars for the new additions. Arne repaired those in need and learned to play all of them.

"I would read about old instruments," he explained, "and always wanted to know what they sounded like."

Lacking the means to travel abroad, he developed a network of contacts to help him locate obscure instruments. Missionaries traveling in Africa, India, and the Orient brought back unusual

The National Music Museum

University of South Dakota,
414 East Clark Street
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Tel. 605-677-5073

<http://www.usd.edu/smm/>

Founded on the campus of the University of South Dakota on July 1, 1973.

The collections of more than 13,500 American, European, and non-Western instruments from all cultures and historical periods are the most inclusive anywhere. 750 of them are in the exhibition, protected by a sophisticated climate-control system.

They include tools for making and tuning musical instruments; sheet music; sound recordings; archives of luthiers and instrument manufacturers; composer and band and orchestra archives.

Many of the collections are unique in the world or second only to the countries of origin of the instruments

Self-guided audio tours with 50 stops allow visitors to hear the instruments they see.

There is a concert hall for performing and recording on historical instruments, study areas, a specialized library, and a modern conservation laboratory.

pieces. People in Europe, devastated by World War II, were ready to exchange instruments for food.

By 1964 valuable musical instruments were "piled to the ceiling" of his house and he developed a public program during which he would demonstrate about 50 instruments for various groups. In 1966 Arne accepted the position of Professor of Music in Vermillion. That summer a number of fully loaded grain trucks rolled down the highway, each carrying hundreds of instruments to the site of the future museum. He wanted his collection to remain in the region where he had lived. To those who questioned this choice, he would say:

"It's no farther from New York to Vermillion than it is from Vermillion to New York."

For years Arne delighted countless visitors by performing tunes on various instruments, telling stories, and giving tours. Now the Museum staff continues this tradition.

Yes, we found a treasure in this hospitable town—the National Music Museum—with endless possibilities to study the instruments, or just enjoy their voice and the craftsmanship they are made with.

Aurora Moussorlieva is from Sofia, Bulgaria. She finished history in the Sofia University in 1988 with a thesis on 19th-century Irish history. She has translated several books from English to Bulgarian and a couple from Bulgarian to English. She was a guide in the National Museum of History for more than 10 years where she also taught a class for tour guides with the New Bulgarian University. Her articles are published in Bulgarian and American magazines and newspapers.

TO CLAP OR NOT TO CLAP—IS THAT THE QUESTION?

An Ambivalent Treatise on Concert Behavior

by Lucy Miller Murray

Would that I still owned a pair of white gloves. Then I could give you a direct and objective list of the do's and don'ts of concert behavior:

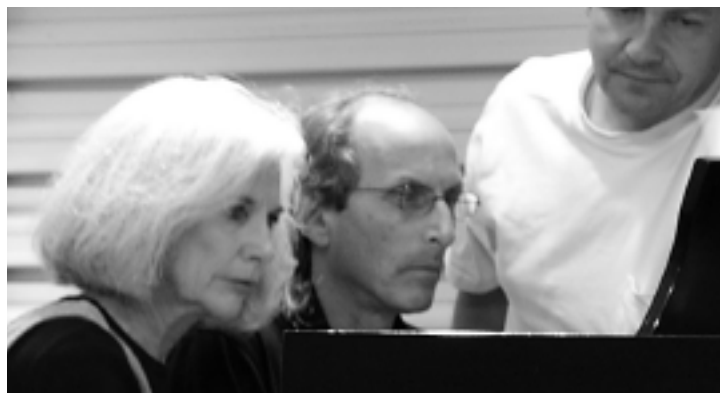
1. Do arrive on time.
2. Do read your program notes before the music starts.
3. Don't make noise during performance.
4. Don't clap between movements.
6. Don't exit the hall until applause is finished.

As a presenter for some 26 years, I wouldn't think of giving that list to my audiences for fear of condescending to the old faithfuls and intimidating new members. This is to say nothing of how those rules have changed over the years. So rather than place the whole burden on the concert-goer, I have decided to share it among presenters, audience and even performers. Here are the new and ambivalent rules:

For presenters: First of all start on time. One late start time encourages another, so let your audiences know that your performances begin as advertised. If you must tolerate latecomers, inform your ushers that the stragglers should wait until the end of a first movement to be seated. Most artists are attuned to this and cast an eye for latecomers before they begin the second movement. Offenses to this can be devastating. I remember seeing Ricardo Muti look down his beautiful, aquiline nose at late intruders as he was lifting his baton to begin a symphony. The rest of the audience

held its breath as the embarrassed couple struggled to their seats. I bet they never did that again!

Audience members: If you read your program notes before the music begins, it means, first of all, that you are on time, and secondly, that you might appreciate the music more—assuming they are not tedious ones that refer to the recapitulation occurring in the thirty-ninth bar following the development section, or, better yet, the progression of the subdominant chord to the truncated third. Since I write program notes, I cannot be objective



Lucy, performing with Richard Weinert (Dan Epstein turning pages)

about this point and am often caught peeking at my notes as I hear a work and think, "What did I say about *that*?"

Don't make noise during the music—unless you are encouraged to do so, as my audience was recently in a performance of Daniel Bernard Roumain's *String Quartet No. 5* dedicated to Rosa Parks. In the joyful "Klap Ur Hands" movement the audience was instructed to do just that and did so with a great sense of involvement in the music. On the other hand, an inebriated audience member was once dragged from my hall by security guards during the *Adagio* of Schubert's *Cello Quintet*. I wished they

had waited until the end of that sacred moment. So what's the point? If you have to make noise, do it during a scherzo, or teach your security guards about adagios?

Cellist Paul Katz, one of the victims of that incident, tells three more hilarious tales of outlandish concert behavior. The first involved a young man sitting in the first row who took out a score and baton and conducted, with grand gestures, the entire Beethoven *String Quartet, Op. 131*. Then there was the janitor who walked on stage during a performance pushing a giant trash can

on wheels. Oblivious to all, he swept up and departed with a slam of the stage door. If that's not bad enough, consider this: When the Cleveland Quartet played on television for the Grammy Awards, the musicians were wheeled out before the audience on a large set with glass candelabras that clinked so loudly they had to delay their Brahms. When finally they were able to begin, a cowboy type shouted, YA HOOOOO!

We could get serious about this and refer to Elliott Carter in his *Collected Essays and Lectures, 1937-1995*, when he speaks bravely of listening to *serious* music: "Serious music appeals to a longer span of attention and to a more highly developed auditory memory than do more popular kinds of music." You have to be Elliott Carter celebrating your 100th birthday to get away with statements like that today, but perhaps it is time to relinquish some of the instant visual gratification that surrounds us and give in to our "auditory memory" that will lead to an understanding and appreciation of music and to an automatically correct

behavior in listening to it. After all, you can't crackle candy wrappers, jangle your jewelry, or chew gum and extend your auditory memory all at one time.

And now to my favorite subject: clapping between movements. Here I can give you only my own personal opinion, and an old-fashioned one. In perfectly respectable venues these days, it happens, but I hate it. Of course there are the honored exceptions such as after the long and virtuosic first movement of the Tchaikovsky *Violin Concerto*, but, as matter of habit, I detest it, especially when it is just that—a matter of habit. If it is a spontaneous response to an extraordinary moment, I can buy it, but even that has its limitations especially after a moving slow movement when it jerks one from any sense of contemplation. There are old and set rules about this, but I think that common sense can serve as a guide. Performers can help, too, by communicating with the audience in subtle gestures.

I am encouraged lately to learn of educational programs for young audiences that include instructions on concert behavior—all done in humorous good spirits. The Lark Chamber Artists has a program where the members of the ensemble play the offenders by crackling candy wrappers, chattering, and even wearing a hint inappropriate dress (if there is such a thing). Bruce Adolphe, The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's Education Advisor, does a program that asks, "When is it appropriate to snore in a concert hall?" During a performance of Adolphe's *Urban Scenes for String Quartet and Kids*, the great snoring solo is performed by

a kid from the audience. All of this, of course, we hope is instructional and not a self-fulfilling prophecy!

Finally, please, please don't leave the hall until the clapping is finished. On that one I will stand strong because artists truly need and deserve that acclaim, and one person getting out of his seat can be the death knell of it. Presenters can help by pleading with stage people not to turn up the lights before the applause is over. To do so, will bring everything to a harsh conclusion.

Artists, presenters, and audiences all have a part in concert behavior. Artists must work hard on their programming and performance. Presenters must attend to details that make the audience comfortable and attentive. Audiences must either follow the rules of sensitive behavior or have a good reason why they don't. For artists, I think pianist Peter Orth may sum up everything when he cautions performers about "chastising" their audiences in the manner of a famous few we will leave unnamed. "Even if audiences clap at the wrong time," says Orth, "I find it lovely. For me, audiences are my magic enablers."

As in everything else in life, we presenters, artists, and audience

must make our choices in concert behavior and hope they benefit the common good of the art form. Let us all be "magic enablers"—with or without white gloves.

And, of course, let's remember to turn off our cell phones.

Lucy Miller Murray is Founding Director of Market Square Concerts in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Her book, Adams to Zemlinsky: A Friendly Guide to Chamber Music, was recently published by Concert Artists Guild of New York and is available at www.concertartists.org. and www.amazon.com.

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