

# MUSIC FOR THE LOVE OF IT

SEPTEMBER 2008

## *Musique en vacances* in Loches by Ted Rust



Cristophe Mourot and Fabrice Trompat in the Georges Besse Courtyard

This August I attended a *stage de musique*, the European term for a summer music workshop with professional coaching. *Musique en vacances (Mev)* is held annually at the Collège Georges Besse, overlooking the medieval town of Loches in the Loire Valley of France. In my ten days there I made dozens of new friends. I learned much about French music, language manners, and even more about myself.

### Background

Organized in 1981, *Mev* brings together about 100 amateur musicians. It provides lodging (hotel or dorm rooms), excellent meals, rehearsal space, an organized music program, and time for fun. The workshop is conducted in French.

I chose *Mev* among the European summer *stages* because it admits a wide range of instruments (including voice and harp) and a wide span of ages (teens, working adults and retirees), and provides collateral courses in drawing, solfège and music theory for non-playing visitors. I applied and was accepted in April. The very considerate workshop organizers contacted me shortly afterward to solicit my preferences of repertoire. I downloaded my music assignments

and the roster of participants via the web site in early June. Soon after assignments and participants were posted, several of my ensemble partners for the two assignments sent friendly e-mails offering help in finding sheet music and expressing anxiety over the indicated tempos.

### Getting ready

Learning to perform a piece of chamber music with any group of strangers is hard enough. At *Musique en vacances*, I was to be one of only four Americans among 105 musicians, two-thirds of them French. Concerned that I would be baffled by French coaching and rehearsal discussions, I located a Francophone pianist and signed up for eight lessons in musical French. Soon I was practicing *sofège* to recognize note names, and learning that a quarter-note rest is *un soupir*, a half-note is *une blanche*, G-sharp is *sol dièse*. Of course there would more to learn on site: more technical terms and much of the slang employed by my teachers and colleagues. (*Une panne*, a breakdown, translates colloquially as a trainwreck; "*J'ai merdé cette phrase*" I could actually figure out for myself, though hearing the street term for manure as a verb was new to me.)

### Getting There

To minimize jet lag, I flew to Paris from Boston two days before the workshop. I used my first free afternoon on the musicians' street, the *Rue de Rome*, to have my instrument checked and to shop for sheet music. *Mev* arranged for a comfortable tour bus to take the non-driving *stagistes* from Paris to Loches, and on board I met the first of a long string of new friends.

### Making friends

My seat-mate on the bus was Jörg Peterson, a German violinist, and my across-the-aisle neighbor Laura

Williamson was a singer from Texas; we talked non-stop from Paris to Loches. I had exchanged e-mails about our music assignments with bassoonist Franz-Jörg Schoenes and clarinetist Isabelle LeRouge, and on an impulse asked them to be on the lookout for me in my blue baseball cap. Both recognized me on our first encounters and made me feel very welcome. Franz-Jörg and his wife Ursula were lodged in the Luccotel, as was I, and we became good friends, sharing several meals and outings.

Within a day or so my circle of acquaintances began to expand along musical and linguistic channels. I soon knew all my ensemble partners and coaches, the oboists, the few native English speakers, and many of the singers. Joining them at meals, faculty concerts and café outings, I got to know in turn their friends and family members. Joint projects cemented friendships: the oboists cooperated on adjusting reeds and instruments, my ensemble partners Jean-Luc Petit and Frédéric Bourgoïn helped me organize a reading; Laura and I led a sing-along of American folk songs. But many of my nicest exchanges were intangibles: stories, jokes, mutual encouragement. Best of all, there was time for a few long conversations about my colleagues' lives and enthusiasms.

continues on page 4

## Inside

Trainwreck	page 2
The In Box	page 3
Parenting a Young Musician	page 5
About Fiddling	page 6
Double Bass	page 7

## Train Wreck by Christine Stone (Aunt Stanbury)

---

We're all told throughout our musical lives that when something goes wrong in a performance, *"don't stop; don't falter; keep the beat and carry on as if everything was fine, and maybe people will think it is."* I've seen very good performers reach the point where there's nothing to do but regroup. But if one possibly can persevere one should, as illustrated by the following morality tale.

A Browning is a sixteenth-century instrumental composition based on a tune called *The Leaves Be Green*, also known as "Browning" or "Browning My Dear." The tune is repeated throughout the piece, migrating from one part to another, often in conjunction with a second tune. In the style of the time, the lines are melodically and rhythmically independent, and the harmonies produced don't lead from one chord to another with the inevitability of eighteenth-century progressions. When playing such a composition from a part, the only way to keep one's place is, as one Recorder Society consort leader put it, to "count like mad."

I'm not sure what prompted my inexperienced recorder consort to undertake William Byrd's five-part Browning and persist in trying to play it. For the longest time we'd wade in, get lost, give up with a whimper and start again, or sit in grim silence broken by an occasional muttered remark about what we might do to fix this piece. We never came close to getting through it until one of the coaches we hired from time to time told us, "You never need to worry about getting lost in this piece." He went on to explain to a circle of

incredulous faces that in the modern edition we were using all the rehearsal letters are on the last note of the regularly repeated tune; the last note falls on the first beat of the measure, and the next repetition begins as a pickup on the third beat.

Armed with the knowledge that if you find yourself out of sync with everyone else you sit out and wait for the tune to come around again, we persevered and did better. We continued to have issues with the piece — it was still possible to become so muddled as not to know which rehearsal letter everyone else was approaching, and interesting situations were created when a person sitting out in a confused condition was supposed to be playing the tune — but knowing how to get back in greatly reduced the meltdowns.

Consort Night, the last Recorder Society meeting of the year, provided members and friends with an opportunity to perform for a small, sympathetic audience. In a rash moment we committed ourselves to Byrd's Browning. We didn't think about it at the time; but since we got the music from the Recorder Society music library, some of our audience must have played it.

Each consort was sent to a room by itself to warm up and run through its music. We were joined in our assigned room by a fellow no one had seen before, who must have been quartered on us because he wouldn't take no for an answer and someone thought we might be able to manage him. In fact, he unnerved us to the point where we kept getting lost and having to stop and regroup. He would then announce emphatically that it was impossible to

play this piece without a conductor. We were, of course, committed to doing exactly that, for an audience, in about twenty minutes.

I think we were last on the program. Andy, playing soprano, knew his part thoroughly. Katharine, on alto, was a solid player and a solid human being but lacked confidence in performance. The other alto, Don, was moody and not altogether reliable, and he didn't like Renaissance music. Sherry, our tenor player, was probably the weakest musician and a nervous person generally; but being chronically on pins and needles, she was used to playing in that condition and actually was no more likely than the next person to fall apart. I was quite sure of my bass part, which is easier than the others, and I love this piece. It may have been my bullying that kept us at it all that time.

We were all right until, in the second half of the piece, the meter changes ("half = dotted half and vice versa subsequently," the sheet music said). In the heat of battle, the duple and triple meters pulling against each other were too much for us. The first to fall off the edge was one of the altos; the other soon followed. Sherry soldiered along on tenor, but with two other parts missing and the tune likely enough absent in some place where she was used to hearing it, she lost confidence and dropped out. That left me and Andy. Sherry came back in, but not quite right. Then there was a horrible moment where Andy had a beat or two rest, leaving me and Sherry, not together. I knew the piece well enough to consider throwing my lot in with Sherry. But if I did that, what would Andy do? Andy practiced

a lot and worked hard to minimize unscheduled deviations from plan. He might be thrown by an *ad hoc* adjustment.

In the beat or two of a 3/4 measure in which I had to decide, I opted to stick with the correct count, which at that moment existed somewhere in the ether or in the mind of God or of Andy but wasn't represented by any of the consort except me. With the next beat, there was Andy's soprano, right where it was supposed to be. Sherry took a tuck or jumped ahead, which ever was called for; Don and Katharine fell in behind; and we finished together, to a rousing round of applause. A long-time recorder player and president of the Society, who had tried it herself, commented, "You've got courage to take on that 'Leaves Be Green' thing." After that Consort Night, Byrd's Browning lost its terrors and became something of a signature piece for the group.

*A frequent contributor to Music for the Love of It, Christine Stone (Aunt Stanbury) writes: "I am female, not young, based in the Northeast, and something of a square peg. More of her writings appear at auntstanbury.blogspot.com.*

## The In Box

### Downloadable Sheet Music

Most of J.S. Bach's cantatas in vocal scores with keyboard reduction of the orchestral parts are now available as free pdf downloads from several sources. One with an excellent index and extensive background information is the Bach Cantatas Website at [www.bach-cantatas.com](http://www.bach-cantatas.com).

Scores and critical commentaries of the entire Neue Mozart-Ausgabe edition are available in digital form from Mozarteum Salzburg at [www.mozarteum.at](http://www.mozarteum.at). The link is found under Scholarship/Research/NMA Online.

Robert Weiner Music offers reductions of major flute and oboe concertos in which a string trio or quartet replaces the orchestra. The concertos can thus be played as chamber music, giving the players and listeners a more nuanced sense of the interplay of voices than would be possible with a piano reduction. They can be downloaded in pdf format from [www.robertweinermusic.com](http://www.robertweinermusic.com).

## NEW BOOK

### "Musicianship for Adult Amateurs"

How to practice	Tuning your instrument
Understanding rhythm	Warm-ups
Practicing particular skills	Definitions
Graphic representation of sound	Phrasing (and more)
Beginning music theory	8 1/2" x 11", 150 pages

Author is graduate of Eastman School of Music  
Send check for \$25 plus \$7 shipping to  
Ronald T. Hakala, 907 SW 7th Ave.,  
Boynton Beach, FL 33426

**FORRESTS**  
THE DOUBLE REED SPECIALISTS

for our complete catalog and  
easy online ordering, go to:

**[www.forrestsmusic.com](http://www.forrestsmusic.com)**

INSTRUMENTS  
ACCESSORIES  
REED TOOLS  
SUPPLIES  
REEDS  
VOCALS  
CASES  
RECORDINGS  
BOOKS & MUSIC

1848 University Ave., Berkeley, CA 94703 USA

800-322-6263 510-845-7178

9:00 AM to 5:00 PM Pacific Time, Mon.-Sat.

*Music for the Love of It* Vol. 21 No. 5, September 2008

ISSN 0898-8757

Published bimonthly at 67 Parkside Dr., Berkeley, CA 94705  
phone 510/654-9134, web site address [musicfortheloveofit.com](http://musicfortheloveofit.com).

Ted Rust, Editor-Publisher, Janet Telford, Co-Editor  
Workshop Guide (January) \$15, other issues \$5.

Print Subscription \$30/year in U.S., Canada and Mexico,  
\$40/year elsewhere. PDF subscription \$20/year, \$30 with  
archive access. © 2008 Edgar (Ted) Rust



Loches continued from page 1

Morning mist over Loches at dawn, from the Luccotel

### Rehearsals and lessons

Each assigned group—I was in two wind quintets—met daily for an hour with its *professeur* and studied its assigned piece under strict, full-time supervision. There was no question of interpretation, at least not until the rhythms, dynamics and articulations printed in the score were accurately reproduced to the *prof's* satisfaction. This approach felt downright dictatorial at first. I was even more shocked when, after one of the weaker groups broke down in a student concert, a *prof* moved onto the stage and conducted his quartet from the piano bench, I was the visitor: it was my job to suspend judgment and try to understand what was going on, but this really seemed a bit much. Later, however, a French violinist (and psychiatrist) named Caroline Pelabon explained to me that the French approach has two great merits: it makes it possible for less experienced chamber music players to participate musically from the outset, and it is what the majority of players expect, since it is the method they experienced from childhood in French schools. It was done kindly for the most part, with careful attention to the needs of each student.

My assigned *profs*, Philippe Durand, a composer and horn player, and



Aloïs Bürkle with Philippe Durand



Julia Ollivier, Laurent Van Eenod and Jeanne Delecroix

Laurent Van Eenod, a bassoonist, proved to be thoroughly likeable people, experienced chamber musicians and excellent teachers.

Private lessons were available from all *profs* on request. Daniel Py, an oboist, was very generous with his time and was especially helpful to me in learning to appreciate (and occasionally reproduce) the French *sec staccato*. It is articulated with the breath as much as the tongue, so as to produce extremely short notes without stripping them of *sonorité*.

Choral singing and orchestral playing were available daily in the hour after lunch. I chose to sing, partly in hope of making my French more fluent, and enjoyed the music as well.

### Performances and venues

*Mev's* length and numerous performance venues made possible a delightful variety of performances. All concerts were open to the public, although most of the audience were *stagistes*, *profs* and family members. Two excellent faculty concerts were held in the church of Saint Antoine. Participants presented single movements from their assigned works in *Moments musicaux*, held there and variously in an outdoor Renaissance

courtyard of the *Chancellerie*, under a beautiful gazebo in the public garden next to the *Chateau*, and in the large multipurpose room of the *Collège Georges Besse*. The weather generally cooperated, producing rain only on



Wolfgang Sieghart plays for royalty in the Chancellerie Courtyard



Franz-Jörg Schoenes, Irène Mopin and Ted Rust in the Gazebo

days already scheduled for indoor performances. My two ensembles performed in a single concert at the public gardens, which I enjoyed enormously. Finally, informal "*salons des refusés*" were held in the refectory by those wanting to perform works or movements not programmed for public concerts. At every event the *stagistes* turned out enthusiastically to support their friends and *profs*.



## Parenting a Young Musician

by Wanda Marie Thibodeaux



Pianist with Florence Niel-Duyé and Fabienne Audigier in the Refectory (Salon des Réfusés)

### Tips for prospective *stagistes*

1. If possible, find out your assignments early, and learn the music.
2. Learn the common expressions of courtesy of the host country and the musical terms likely to be used in rehearsals and coachings.
3. Join in as many activities, gatherings and outings as physically possible. Make friends, including some people from the host country: they can be a vital support system if the need arises.
4. Get in enough practice and physical exercise, and if possible, enough sleep.
5. Withhold judgment when something doesn't go well. Especially when overwhelmed with new experiences, one may not be entirely open-minded. When in doubt, consult your new friends.

Emmie was six years old when her mother brought her to me for lessons, but she was exceptionally bright. At first she seemed eager and willing to learn, but as lessons progressed, Emmie all but shut down in lessons. She would not respond to my prompts or inquiries, and almost always seemed on the verge of tears. When I asked, her mother told me she had been forcing Emmie to practice more than an hour at a time (unreasonable for the student's age) and had been telling her that the music "had to be right." Privileges such as TV were removed until practicing was over. I learned that piano was one of half a dozen extracurricular activities in which Emmie was enrolled. Worse, the hectic schedule resulted in piano practice being left until the last minute.

Over time, I was able to work out a more reasonable practice schedule for Emmie with her mother, and with much encouragement and assurances, Emmie finally came out of her musical shell. I made it a point to stress all the things that she was doing well even as we went back to work on problem areas. She began to ask questions and to tell me honestly what was difficult for her and why. She completed more assignments even though she was putting in less practice time.

After Emmie, I had many students whose parents had a profound impact on their behavior during lessons. In general, the more relaxed parents were about lessons, the more fun music appeared to the student, although those students often exhibited more mistakes. By contrast, the more parents portrayed music as an obligation, the less students enjoyed their time at the keyboard, even though those students

often did better in terms of musical precision.

Some parents are unable to adjust their expectations to what their child can physically, mentally, and emotionally produce at their age. A good teacher can counteract this problem by always working out problem areas positively with the student (e.g., "You have such beautiful expression in this phrase—let's really bring that out by fixing the pitches there.") This positive atmosphere teaches the student that there is a place outside of the home in which music can be explored with encouragement and that the parental response to their music making is not the only response available to them.

Teachers may also need to discuss with the parents how their parenting is affecting their child's progress. A parent who works two jobs and has four children, for example, may see forcing their child to sit at the piano for an entire hour in one day as a matter of necessity because they may not have time to work with the child in small increments throughout the week. A teacher can work with the parents to ensure that the home musical environment is positive, that assignments are appropriate in difficulty, and that the child has time to complete the work.

If a child seems not to be progressing or is unhappy in practice and lessons, the problem may have more to do with *how* music is approached than with whether or not the opportunity and aptitude for music exists. Be sure to ask the child frequently if they are enjoying themselves, and never force a child to continue practicing beyond their enjoyment—after all, enjoyment is the whole purpose of the art.

## What is it about Fiddling? by Ryan Thomson



A mother recently inquired about fiddle lessons for her daughter who seemed to have a diminishing interest in music after years of classical violin lessons. We agreed that a healthy dose of fiddling might revive her interest and made plans for a trial lesson. The new student showed up at my home with a satchel of music and played some of it at my request.

### **Fiddling is playing by ear . . .**

I then asked her to play something from memory, perhaps a scale or a tune. She replied that her former teacher always had her play from written music at lessons. She had no pieces memorized, and could barely play a major scale by ear. She then read her familiar fiddle tunes for me while standing stiffly at my music stand. Overall, she had good tone and violin technique, but her playing didn't sound like fiddling.

### **. . . and owning "Egan's Polka"**

Right away I proposed to teach her a tune without the use of written music. I picked "Egan's Polka," which is an Irish polka from County Kerry. It's an easy tune, lively, fun to play, and fun to dance to. After 20 minutes of teaching her the various phrases of the tune, along with some simple variations, she had it in her mind, under her fingers, and almost up to dance speed. At that point I was able to put down my violin and accompany her on piano playing in a style suitable for a Saturday night Irish Ceili dance.

I told her that she now "owned" a piece that she could play any time, no written music needed, perhaps by a campfire at night, or just for fun with friends playing guitar or other folk instruments. Her mother was smiling. We set the date for the next lesson.

### **How I teach fiddling**

Fiddle tunes are designed to be played in mixed ensembles with other folk instruments. So as soon as one of my students learns a tune well enough to play at a steady pace, I switch to different accompaniment instruments, to provide the experience of real life ensemble playing. If the tune is French Cajun, I may play along on Cajun accordion; for a New England contra dance tune I'll play piano, and for an Irish jig, I may play pennywhistle or wooden flute. Appalachian and bluegrass tunes call for banjo.

I generally teach an entire basic fiddle tune to students during a lesson. After the basic version can be played from memory I add additional bowing and melody variations. We never play from written music during a lesson, which would slow down the process of building a memorized repertoire.

### **Expanding your repertoire**

I have a reference library of several hundred books of fiddle tunes to help with that. There are also plenty of tunes to be found on the internet though it takes some knowledge to recognize the good versions.

There is a fine line between "playing from written music" and "memorizing from written music." Written music can be a very useful tool for "getting at" a basic version of a tune. The tune should be memorized as quickly as possible, and then the written music put out of sight. At that point the tune is ready to be customized into a "real fiddle tune" ready for ornamentation and variations.

Well practiced tunes played from memory always sound better than tunes read from music. Continuously playing a fiddle tune from written

music freezes it into a static piece. If a player's version of a tune remains fluid it can more easily evolve in complexity over a lifetime of playing.

### **Playing together**

Much of the available fiddle repertoire is easily accessible to people with a huge variation of violin playing skills. You don't have to study violin for years before you can make good music with others. An advanced beginner can often play a basic version of a common tune at a dance or performance right up to speed with a professional fiddler playing an advanced version of the same tune. And even the most basic fiddle tune can be developed in such a way as to challenge the techniques of the most experienced violinist.

Unlike much of the classical repertoire, fiddle tunes often sound good when players are playing different versions at the same time. Experienced players listen closely to each other and adjust their melody variations and ornamentation to be complementary. An experienced player can adjust to the playing of a beginner so that both sound good playing together, or can, for example, compose on-the-spot harmonies and rhythmic variations with other players.

Fiddling will bring out an exuberant, sociable and creative side of your musical personality you may never have realized existed. It will be your ticket to a friendly, inclusive world of fellow fiddlers, and a chance to "own" hundreds or thousands of great tunes. Give it a try!

*Ryan Thomson was the author of "Coping With Focal Dystonia" in our June 2002 issue. You can find out more about him on his web site at [captainfiddle.com](http://captainfiddle.com).*

## Double Bass by Jason Karpf

---

Adolescence and music are a powerful mix—nine parts hormones to hopefully one part theory, technique and other such noble topics. I lived the experience as a beginning electric bass player in the late seventies. Thirty years later, my teenage son, Brian, has picked up the instrument. So has his middle-aged dad, all over again.

Brian began his musical journey when his friends formed a band and needed someone on bass. I don't have scientific proof that most bassists arise from such vacancies, but after a similar call from my pals in 1977, I was soon plucking a spindly Fender Precision knockoff. I was careful to give Brian his proverbial space as he started playing bass. This was his time, his choices, his music. He didn't need some guy with gray temples and a bald spot jumping up to show him "hot licks." Besides, I had hardly played in the past two decades. My musical authority sat in the back of the closet with my ax.

I encouraged Brian when he began lessons with Mike Bear, an excellent private teacher. I knew that a strong relationship with a knowledgeable instructor was vital. During my early playing, I had received invaluable music and life lessons from my private teacher, Christopher Roberts, a bassist/composer who eventually earned a doctorate from Juilliard. My wife, Ann, presented her stepson with a check to help with lesson fees and Brian was on his way, ready to assume bass duties in his friends' band.

But Brian wasn't satisfied having me watch from the sidelines. He asked me to help him review exercises from his lessons. His preferred musical style is "death metal," a sub-genre that makes

Black Sabbath and Metallica sound mainstream. He gave me a primer, playing a CD compilation of his favorite artists. I gave back an honest critique of the songs I heard, pointing out the bands that I felt had the most inventive compositions and arrangements.

Brian asked what I felt was the most important thing for a new bass player to do. I replied that the first priority is to get a good sound out of the instrument. A whole note played well is an accomplishment. Young musicians pursue showy riffs often at the expense of intonation and basic technique. I told Brian that I learned this personally when I had recorded myself playing solo long ago. The tape had not lied: my pizzicato was painful to hear as I had thwacked the strings, desperate for power and volume. Brian faces similar challenges as he competes with his able drummer's dual bass drum pedal. A smooth, supple attack on the strings will ultimately deliver the punchiest tone.

My mini-lessons and jam sessions with Brian were having unforeseen effects. My old calluses resurfaced (better than the rookie blood blisters of '77). My trusty G&L L-1000 bass permanently left its closet exile. And my son and I acquired an automatic source for quality time—playing, discussing and listening to music. YouTube has become a jukebox and teaching aid. I run clips of funk legends like Larry Graham and Louis Johnson for Brian. In turn, he shows me videos of younger bass masters such as Les Claypool and Martin Mendez. We then dissect the bass lines we've watched and heard.

Brian and I share one more musical

trait—a healthy love of performance. We were both able to express this during one recent weekend. Brian's band was opening act at the Ventura Theatre, a glorious, old movie palace converted into a cavernous rock club. I took my seat in the "parents section" (well away from the mosh pit) and cheered on the lads. For being the newest musician in the group, Brian more than held his own, keeping a tight groove with his bandmates, moving to the lip of the stage to engage the crowd.

Two days later, it was my turn in a setting that had its own brand of energy. I sat in with the praise band at our church, Newbury Park First Christian. There are two regular bass players in the ensemble; my addition in the rotation helps free up their schedules. The sound is contemporary Christian, a melding of pop, rock, country and gospel led by Worship Pastor Doug Baird. It was the first time I had played with an organized band or worked with written parts in nearly 20 years. It was thrilling to join excellent musicians before a large, appreciative audience.

Adolescence and music are a powerful mix. It is a joy to watch the combination all over again with my son. Maturity and music blend nicely too. It is no longer a rock-star-or-bust proposition for me. Today I play music for the love of it.

*Jason Karpf is a public relations/marketing executive and published author. He is a graduate of the Grove School of Music's Composing and Arranging Program.*

# Portable Lighting Reinvented!



**Order Now!**  
LampCraft.com  
1-800-277-5527

# **SUPER™** **GigLight**

by LampCraft  
Patent Pending

**3 Times brighter than  
the regular GigLight™**

**MUSIC FOR THE LOVE OF IT**

67 Parkside Drive  
Berkeley, CA 94705

**Return Service Requested**

**Presorted  
Standard  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Permit No. 336  
Richmond, CA**