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# Moments of Insight

THE MAGIC OF THE MUSICAL MOMENT





## P R E L U D E

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The older I get and the more I explore, the more I seem to find wisdom in classic texts. In his *Analects*, for specific example, Confucius declared, “Let a person be stimulated by poetry, established by the rules of propriety, and

*perfected by music.*” (The emphasis is mine.)

What a remarkable and profound notion that last bit is — to understand, centuries ago no less, that Musical Experience supports the further development and ultimate perfection of the human spirit! Surely that notion touches upon the insight that all mature musicians carry, and which sustains their commitment to the art. It’s the understanding that musicians

would wish to pass along to those who do not yet fully understand the power of the art.

Our 21st-century lives are too often noisy, hectic, and thoroughly cluttered with the details of contemporary life. In such times it can be daunting to see and fully embrace those few things within our lives, which are most precious. Within a classroom, every good teacher knows, the thing that is most precious is the moment of revelation — when a key concept suddenly takes shape in the minds of the students, and a new and defining clarity about the subject is gained. Such moments have sustained the members of the teaching corps through many generations of students.

In the music setting, a particular alchemy is sometimes possible. The word “alchemy,” of course, is most often associated with historic

attempts to transform less valuable elements into precious metals — most typically lead into gold — a transformation no longer considered possible. But what better term for the transformative magic that can be made when a highly capable teacher, a well-equipped student, and a powerfully expressive musical object are brought together in the classroom? When all is right, the student can suddenly be helped to “see” how the manipulation of sounds can reveal truths about patterns of human feeling — about the human condition — to which they were blind mere moments before. Mere words are largely inadequate to capture the power of these moments. They have been called revelations, aesthetic experiences, and “goosebump moments,” and now musical alchemy. Regardless of which term is used, they are the most precious occurrences in the musical classroom, and

they sustain interest in the field — they keep the students coming back for more.

Those moments are the focus of this issue of *Con Brio*. In the cover article, Bennett Reimer leads us into a fuller understanding of the way those moments can bring particular value and insight in the classroom and rehearsal hall. Long-time Chicago music critic Wynne Delacoma recalls some moments when she was deeply affected by music in a concert setting. And others from among our faculty and alumni try to convey some moments of musical magic that they experienced.

We’ve taken up this theme as we do all of our work — with spirit. We wish you many magical musical moments of your own. •

Dean Donald Casey  
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### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Achieving Musical Knowing, *page 2*

The Critic Gets Goosebumps, *page 4*

These Magic Moments, *page 6*

What is a Masterpiece, Anyway?, *page 8*

Making Magic, *page 10*

Unforgettable, *page 15*





# Achieving Musical Knowing

BY BENNETT REIMER



Strange word, “knowing,” when applied to music. Doesn’t knowing, and its root, “knowledge,” refer to what we get from all those subjects that depend on words and numbers, subjects like science, social studies, history, and geography, on and on, with all the fields yielding factual information? Surely what we get from music, rather than knowing, is something different, something like ... ummm ... uh ... well .... So what do we get from music?

Since at least the time of the early Greeks this question has bedeviled thoughtful people, including many of the finest minds in history. Music has existed all that time (actually much longer) and, with some rare exceptions, has been considered among the highest and most precious achievements of which humans are capable. And there is a kind of rightness to the idea that we “know” something when we’re engaged with music, that we experience something so meaningful, so sense-making, as to make us seek music with eagerness and deep pleasure. For many, and not just for musicians, music is among the most significant values in a life fully lived.

Does “knowing” describe that value usefully? I suggest that it does, at least as well as language is

capable of doing. Language allows us to know in its own, particular way. Same for music. One cannot substitute for the other. But we can use language, not to give us what music gives us, but to clarify why and how music has its unique ways to enable us to know, and why and how teaching and learning music can be conceived as a quest for knowing. Musical knowing.

I have proposed that there are four dimensions of knowing that are implicated in musical experience. Two of them, “knowing about” and “knowing why” use language to lead us closer to what music does that language cannot. Closer, but never all the way. Teachers use language constantly when teaching for musical meaning, aware all the while that the understandings it offers are only tools among many others to get students beyond language to music itself.

## Knowing About, Knowing Why

“Knowing about” deals with an endless amount of information relating to the ways music is created (composing, performing, improvising, arranging) and is responded to (listening, analyzing, evaluating, understanding it in relation to its history and contexts). “Knowing why” deals with the equally

limitless philosophical/theoretical understandings surrounding musical endeavors. Why do people seek out the pleasures music affords? What does emotion or feeling have to do with music? How do we judge the success, or quality, of music? Are there ethical/moral dimensions of music?

Together, those two broad realms of knowing are essential backgrounds for musical experiences of

## Knowing Within

As the craftsmanship of knowing how grows, supported by knowing about and why, it becomes more and more a part of our inner selves, a part that knows within the self, the music and the self inseparable. This “knowing within” music, the unification of musical sounds with the innermost undergoings of which we are capable, can only be hinted at, if that, by language. It is present even

Language allows us to know in its own particular way. Same for music. One cannot substitute for the other.

every sort and at every level, whether for children, adults, consumers, amateurs, or professionals. They powerfully influence what we are able to get from music because they provide the mind-set with which we approach and make sense of it.

## Knowing How

The two other knowings, “knowing how” and “knowing within” bring us home to where music lives in its special world, a world that encompasses the world of which it is a part but that transforms that larger world into a way of being we call “musical.”

“Knowing how” refers to the skills of the body, mind, and sensitivities, in unity, required for creating music and for sharing what those who create it offer. Much of music teaching and learning is devoted to the development of those skills, or competencies, for without them the difficult demands of musical know-how, both in creating and responding, cannot be fulfilled. Knowing how to create and respond creatively to music, from the initial trials of children to the ongoing efforts of seasoned professionals, is a never-ending journey of explorations and discoveries of musical meanings. That journey engages our potentials to think and do music; to know, more fully and deeply, what music makes available to us as nothing else can.

earlier in our development than language, infants demonstrating an incipient musical knowing within when given the opportunity to experience it. Education does not cause it. Only nourishes it.

To do so effectively — that is, to nurture what most matters — the knowing within that music uniquely enables — no, requires — that teachers and their students pursue it not as some distant goal but as an ever-present reality, its fulfillments experienced in abundance in every teaching/learning episode. Good teachers, and their enthralled students, achieve this eloquent inwardness, this musically meaningful insight, or wisdom, when their efforts to know about and why and how are aimed constantly toward their pay-off, the ineffable yet powerfully fulfilling experience of knowing musically within oneself. That achievement, every time it happens, is transformative, making those who undergo it that much more human. That much more “knowing.”

Yes, music does offer pleasure. And so much more. •

DR. BENNETT REIMER is John W. Beattie Professor of Music Education Emeritus, Northwestern University. His concept of four dimensions of knowing implicated in musical experience is presented in “What Knowledge is of Most Worth in the Arts?” in *The Arts, Education, and Aesthetic Knowing*, Ninety-first Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part II, ed. Bennett Reimer and Ralph A. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), Chap. 2. Dr. Reimer received an Honorary Doctorate from DePaul University in 1997.



# The Critic Gets Goosebumps

TRANSCENDENT MOMENTS FROM HER SEAT

BY WYNNE DELACOMA

Sometimes our most indelible musical memories creep up on us.

My expectations weren't high in April 1994 when Michael Tilson Thomas took the Orchestra Hall podium to conduct the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in Tchaikovsky's *Sixth Symphony (Pathétique)*. Thomas isn't my favorite conductor, and I was in the grip of *Pathétique* fatigue. I wasn't looking forward to yet another performance of yet another warhorse.

From the first bars, however, it was clear the Thomas and the CSO had found something fresh and exciting to say. They swirled like giddy Czarist-era debutantes through the second movement. The final movement's opening chords expressed true, uncontrived tragedy. A most unexpected pleasure.

Sometimes the goosebump moment is a mixture of sight and sound.

In October 1998 Lyric Opera of Chicago presented a new production of Richard Strauss's sparkling *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Sung by soprano Deborah Voigt and mezzo Susan Graham, the cast was starry, and by the time all the comedy and tragedy was sorted out, the audience, as well as the characters on stage, were ready to exult in the final scene's celebratory fireworks.

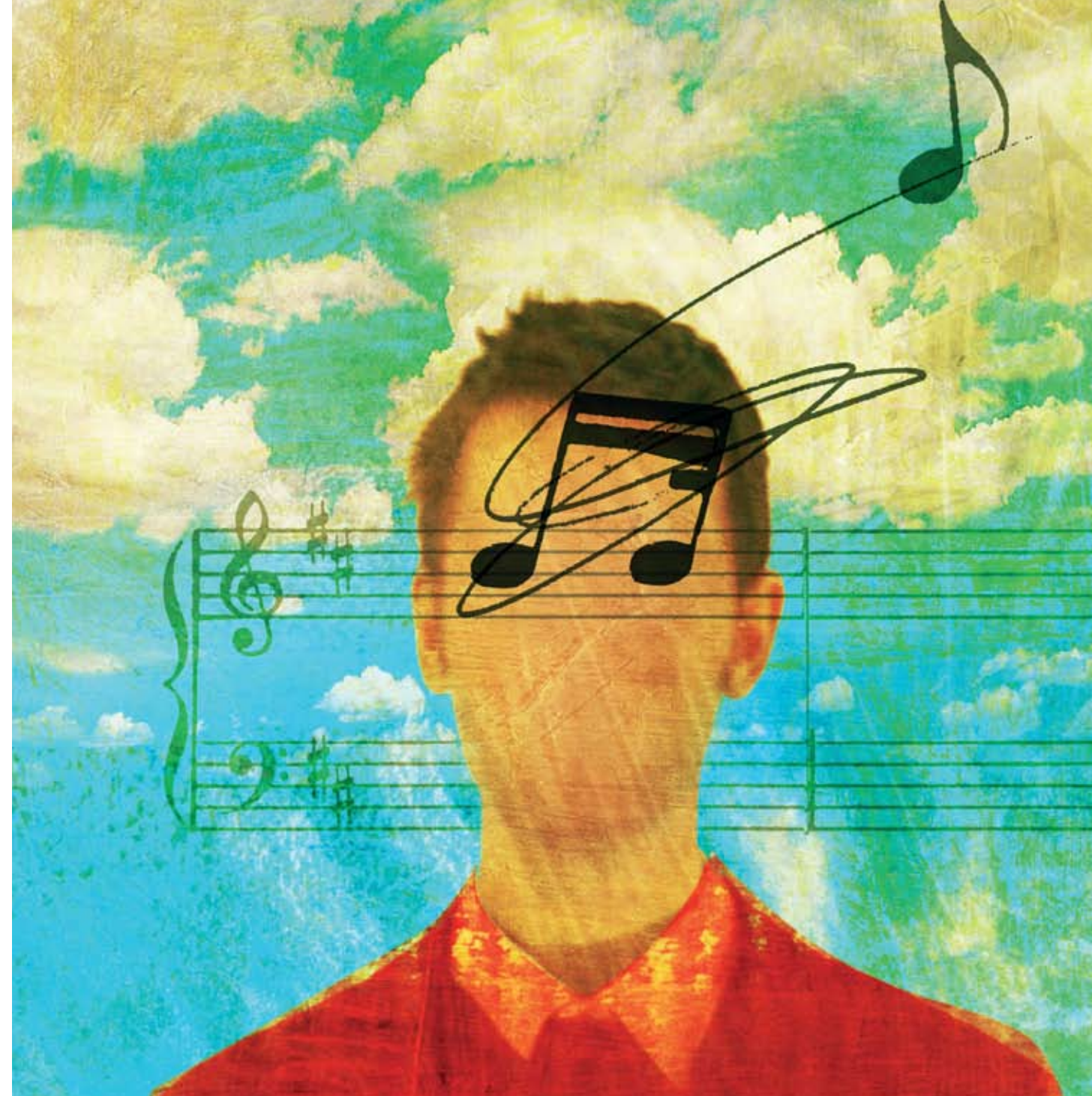
But instead of pretty flash, this production aimed for something deeper. As Strauss's translucent music soared, dozens of small brass chandeliers — the kind with multiple arms found in millions of suburban Colonials — began to descend slowly against the velvety, black, onstage sky. Scattered at random heights across the darkness, their bulbs twinkled like a man-made Milky Way, carrying both the weight of an endless universe and the light-hearted exuberance of a Fourth of July sky. Standard-issue chandeliers as fireworks? Who would have thought of such a thing? How perfect.

And then there are those rare, once-in-a-lifetime moments when everything — superb performance, well-crafted score, and ideal setting — comes together.

It happened in August 2005 when the Grant Park Orchestra performed John Adams's *On the Transmigration of Souls*. Written for the first anniversary of September 11, the quiet, haunting piece for orchestra and chorus included tape-recorded voices of ordinary people reading from the written notes left near Ground Zero by families and friends looking for their loved ones.

The half-spoken, half-chanted phrases — “Missing.” “We will miss you, we all miss you, we love you.” — came at us from all sides through the Pritzker Pavilion's canopy of speakers. The white, glowing Aon Center loomed over the pavilion like one of New York's twin towers. On that clear, warm night, we felt the presence of restless souls, both living and dead. Unforgettable, wrenching. •

WYNNE DELACOMA, the former classical music critic of the Chicago Sun-Times, is a member of the adjunct faculty at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism.



And then there are those rare, once-in-a-lifetime moments when everything — superb performance, well-crafted score and ideal setting — comes together.





# These Magic Moments

BY ROSALIE HARRIS

*There is a moment when a prepared music student, a capable teacher, and a powerful piece of music come together in no ordinary lesson, but in an event of extraordinary union, value, and meaning. Call it magic. Just how powerful is musical magic? Ask one who knows: In J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (1997), no less an eminence than Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, a.k.a. Dumbledore, head of Gryffindor House; transfiguration professor; headmaster, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry; Order of Merlin, First Class; Supreme Mugwump, and Chief Warlock of Wizengamot, considered to be the most powerful wizard of his time, himself a musician, exclaims, "Ah, music. A magic beyond all we do here!"*

Faculty member Mary Stolper, flute, recognizes a physical transformation in her students at times. "Sometimes it's a look in the student's face, like he or she were just infused with electricity and you both start smiling because the light just went to high voltage. Some of the most profound 'got it' moments are when the exact combination of the physical control of the instrument and the mental abilities universally line up for a subtle gesture of something so tender that it brings tears to your eyes. The 'got it' actually is not solely about the notes or even the emotion, but is the fact that the student walked over their own emotional threshold of the music that the composer has written, beyond thinking. It's similar to learning a foreign language and being able to think in that language and not have to re-translate

to yourself. We are all limitless in being capable of doing more with the eloquence of our expressions to communicate with each other."

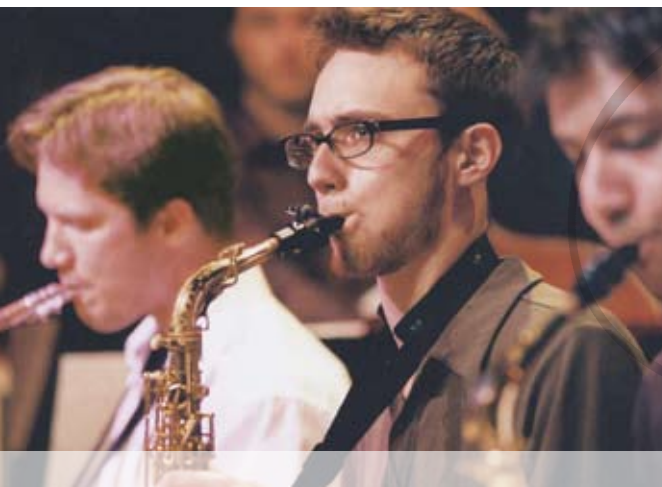
As a case in point, one of Stolper's students, Mark Longo, Class of '08, has embraced the thousands of practice hours needed to play at the next level. The professional level. She said, "His recent accomplishment of making the finals of the Miami New World Symphony two years in a row is quite spectacular. He is someone who now 'gets it.'"

For his part, Longo asked, "How do you put into words Mary Stolper's thoughtful, insightful, perceptive teaching that makes talented students perform 'MAGIC' every lesson? One time when I

think all the stars were in place was in preparation for my graduation recital. The program included a flute sonata from the Court of Frederick the Great, an extended technique piece, Messiaen's *Le merle noir*, and my transcription of Saint Saens's *Violin sonata in d minor*. I am not so sure some of the next statements are true but I will put them out there. In the Fredrick the Great sonata, I tried to go for a Baroque, woody sound on my silver flute, and

DePaul Chamber Orchestra in Carl Stamitz's *Viola Concerto in D Major*, to great acclaim. With Joan, it's much more than preparation, practice, and listening to recordings. She comes to her lessons with her own *ideas*. Without question, Joan has the nature and sound of a violist."

Mark Colby, jazz saxophone, has a special mentoring relationship with one of his former students, alumnus



"Hearing him playing tunes like Johnny Green's jazz standard, *Body and Soul*, I heard the potential I initially sensed become more and more of a reality."

I think Mary wasn't so sure I could pull off keeping the pitch and timbre of each note. By the end of the dress rehearsal she was convinced.

"In the Saint Saens, I wanted her — *really* wanted her — to believe I could pull off this difficult piece on flute. The only problem: I could only hear a violin in my head, not realizing that I was playing a flute. Oh, how young and naïve I was! Through Mary's insistence and knowledge she helped me understand that I needed to do more extensive editing and re-working to pull this off. In the performance ... 'MAGIC.'"

A year ago, Joan Topper, Class of '08, was a violin student, playing occasional viola parts in chamber groups. Finding herself increasingly taken with the instrument, she approached faculty member Rami Solomonow, viola, with the idea of switching instruments. "She took a lesson," Solomonow said, "and the moment she played for me, she got very excited — something amazing to see. In a very short time, with excellent preparation, she became a fine violist, successfully performing much of the important contemporary viola repertoire, including Britten's *Lachrymae* and Hindemith's viola sonatas. By the end of the semester, she soloed with the

Anthony Bruno (BM '07.) "Having taught at DePaul University these last 24 years, I've come across some extremely gifted students. Anthony comes to mind as a student who has been inspired and, at the same time, is inspiring to me." Colby said. "I met him when he was involved with a group called The Youth Ensemble of DuPage, a bunch of high school jazz all-stars. He always displayed that spark of enthusiasm and passion in his playing and attitude — always inquisitive, respectful, and responsive to guidance and suggestions. From the beginning of our relationship, you could just see he was destined to be a wonderful musician. Hearing him playing tunes like Johnny Green's jazz standard, *Body and Soul*, in his sophomore year, I heard the potential I initially sensed become more and more of a reality. I watched his growth spurt startlingly take a gigantic leap. In Anthony's playing, I started to hear the 'history' and maturity that men far older displayed in their performances. I knew he would be successful and, even more importantly, we are friends for the rest of our lives because of our shared passion for creating spontaneous, improvised music."

Bruno said, "Studying with Mark is a constant 'moment of musical insight.' From the instant I



started taking lessons with him, I found myself learning a lot and also learning all of the right things. He has a vast knowledge of the history of jazz and jazz saxophone. When I started working professionally in the Chicago music scene, I knew I had an edge over most of the other musicians or saxophone players I played with. The edge was the insight into playing the music with feeling and history that I received from studying with Mark. He lets you know how to play lyrically, aggressively, laid back, romantically, melodically, etc. Every gig I got called for, I brought all of that history and information with me. Today, I still consider that Mark is a main reason why I get called for work. He gave me the musical insight to play with history and understanding of the jazz language.”

Faculty member Marc Embree, voice, remembers a magical time in his own education. “When I was a young voice student in Berlin years ago, I was studying songs from Schubert’s *Schwanengesang*, specifically the six songs set to poems of Heinrich Heine. One afternoon I had prepared the incredibly challenging *Doppelgaenger* and smugly thought that my teacher, Herr Hoefflin, would be impressed with my insights. I crooned my way through it, careful to be totally and absolutely correct in every way and add a few appropriate dramatic facial tics to up the artistic ante. A bemused Herr Hoefflin, his eyebrows only slightly elevated, responded: ‘Hmmm..Let’s have another look at it.’ He did, indeed, take me through the Lied again, and what a journey it was. This very patient, caring, and insightful man carefully guided me through the entire piece, examining it from all perspectives, inside out and upside down. The text, melody, musical progression, dynamics, rhythmic structure, emotional architecture, articulation, where one could breathe (but the breath must stay a part of the atmosphere, not separately, but concomitantly), one challenge relied on the other to find a resolution. All the ingredients swirled together and whipped up a powerful and shattering two minutes. When the session finished, he told me to let it all settle in and reminded me to remain open, sincere, and flexible — to explore the obvious conflict and thoroughly consider the not-so-obvious and ancillary aspects as well. He gently informed me that I had reached ... ‘A fine beginning!’” •

# What Is A Masterpiece, Anyway?

*Exercise pieces aside, the traditional musical canon at DePaul School of Music is filled with what both musicians and audiences recognize as ‘masterpieces,’ usually defined as “the most outstanding work of a creative artist or craftsman, an outstanding achievement.” “Masterpiece,” or “chef d’oeuvre,” is defined by Merriam-Webster, as “a work done with extraordinary skill; a supreme intellectual or artistic achievement; a piece of work presented to a medieval guild as evidence of qualification for the rank of master.” What do some DePaul faculty members think?*

Cliff Colnot, director of orchestral activities, said, “Any work from the Western classical music canon is a masterpiece. So to specify one (e.g. Beethoven’s *Seventh Symphony* or *Fifth Symphony*, Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*, Mozart’s *Symphony 41*, any Bach) seems odd. As if there is something special about the one I would choose. A masterpiece must powerfully and consistently put forth an original point of view, one that is not largely derivative; it should feature themes or motifs that are organically developed in such ways that no section of the piece overstays its welcome; and it should move the listener.”

“Musical *chef d’œuvre* has a unique fate to be re-born in its versatile multiplicity,” said Eteri Andjaparidze, keyboards coordinator. “The first and principal conception is embodied in the composer’s manuscript,

“Not easily understood on a first encounter, masterpieces challenge and provoke us initially and on repeated listenings. They combine rationality and control with expressivity.”

awaiting for performers to carefully translate notation into sound. As performing artist/teachers, we are blessed by lifetime privilege of literally getting our hands on precious material, which we duly interpret to re-create intense stream of divine consciousness, perfectly organized in musical sounds to strike hearts and minds throughout generations and cultures.”

Daring a specific, Clayton Parr, director of choral activities, said, “To me, Brahms’s *Ein deutsches Requiem* is the quintessential masterwork. In composing the work, which the DePaul Chorus performed in 2001, Brahms was able to include a number of traditional elements, while creating something completely new and intensely personal. The balance of responsibility for carrying the message among choir, soloists, and orchestra is perfectly done. Brahms’s choice of texts about life and death emphasize consolation for the living — a basic human need. Life, death, life beyond death — what could be more important to sing about?”

“The term ‘masterpiece’ is one that I have come to avoid,” said Kurt Westerberg, chair, Department of Musicianship Studies and Composition. “We too often use it as a convenient label that prevents us from truly encountering a work; the label freezes the artistic experience and causes us to place the work on a shelf only to be admired. The works I encounter, eligible for the status of masterpiece, are works that speak for their time yet go beyond their time, giving us a sense of past, present and future. Not easily understood on a first encounter, they challenge and provoke us initially and on repeated listenings. They combine rationality and control with expressivity, and are able to affect us convincingly, both emotionally and intellectually.

“I taught ‘Techniques of 20th Century Orchestration’ to undergraduate composers during winter quarter of the present academic year. We focused on two works that I would certainly label as masterpieces: Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* and Ligeti’s *Lontano*. Each work challenged and continually surprised us with each turn of the page, with every minute listened to. We would think we had the work clearly labeled and understood only to be taken somewhere unexpected. Sections I thought I had memorized and clearly analyzed were revealed anew due to student questions and discussions. We finished by knowing that we had increased our understanding, but also were profoundly aware that there was so much more to discover.” •



downtown Charleston, where he was outfitted with his first instrument, a second-hand clarinet.

When he showed it to the teacher, both were surprised. “I wrote down ‘cornet,’ said Raspillaire.

Combs figures he wouldn’t have been a good cornet player. But his early public school instruction, free private lessons from trombonist Raspillaire, and, soon after, private lessons from clarinetists William Walsh, a member of the Charleston Symphony, and John Crawford, quickly took him places — not literally, at first. With piano accompaniment, he played the third movement of the iconic Mozart *Clarinet Concerto in A major, K. 622* on a

much of a student, he was totally involved in music and applied to The Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and The Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, which he entered in 1957. “Curtis didn’t have room and I didn’t have a scholarship to Eastman,” Combs said. “It was a great sacrifice for my parents to send me there. I took a double major in Performance and Music Education, since my goal at that time was to be a high school band director, which I considered a noble goal.”

While at Eastman, Combs also played a lot of jazz, even toying with the idea of a professional jazz career. In 1960, he cut the album *Jazz Brothers* on a

# Making Magic

BY ROSALIE HARRIS

*“I have nare seed the ocean nor has anyone I know seed it although Daddy has been in the city too, he did not like it with bad water and no air and no mountains like Bethel Mountain yonder, Daddy says he needs a mountain to rest his eyes against”*  
Lee Smith, *Fair and Tender Ladies*

Born in Charleston, West Virginia, on the last day of the 1930’s — December 31, 1939 — DePaul faculty member Larry Combs, principal clarinet of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, traveled far from his geographic roots years ago. But he calls Virginian Lee Smith his favorite author, with West Virginian Ann Pancake a close second. While he sees rural Appalachia as “one of the most beautiful places in the world,” he vividly describes a “trademark” chemical smell stuck in his olfactory memory to this day.

What magic plucked this young man — the only son of a manufacturing salesman and a bookkeeper, neither with a college degree or musical interests — from the mountains to worldwide preeminence on the classical music stage? Luck? Talent? Pluck? Or perhaps fate, sometimes defined as “that in the nature of the universe by which things come to be as they are?” Maybe all of that, and more?

When Combs was ten, his elementary school band director, August Eugene Raspillaire, checked out the fingers and dental structure of his class, writing down the names of recommended instruments on a card meant to be taken home. Young Larry lost the card but told his mother, “It begins with a ‘c’ and ends in ‘t.’” So he and his mother promptly went off to Gorby’s Music in

Charleston stage when he was 12. The next year, he joined the Charleston Symphony, later playing his first solo, the Weber *First Clarinet Concerto*. Then, at the age of 15 — the same year he joined the musicians’ union — Combs left Charleston to spend the first of three summers at The National Music Camp in Interlochen, Michigan. At Interlochen, Combs studied with the influential clarinetist Keith Stein, of Michigan State University. “I learned from Stein that things you did very well gave value,” he said. “For me, that was playing the clarinet.”

During high school, Combs played in a dance band and a Big Band, performing at country fairs, with the Shrine Circus, and for Broadway touring shows. In 1957, he traveled to New York for the first time. With his clarinet quintet, he stayed at the Park Sheraton Hotel across from Carnegie Hall and appeared on the Ted Mack Amateur Hour, where they lost to a one-legged tap dancer. Admittedly not

“I learned from Interlochen teacher Keith Stein that things you did very well gave value. For me, that was playing the clarinet.”

Riverside Records, with Eastman classmate Chuck Mangione and Chuck’s brother, Gap. To publicize the record, he’d have had to travel and leave Eastman, which he decided against. Chuck left Eastman to establish his solo career, eventually returning to lead its Jazz Ensemble.

Immediately after graduation four years later, Combs played an audition as bass clarinet in the New Orleans Symphony Orchestra and was accepted, for \$2,500 a season. That lasted a year. Combs, now married, was drafted in the U.S. Army, posted to the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York, playing with the U.S. Military Academy Band until he was discharged in 1965.

After West Point, Combs returned to the New Orleans Symphony, as principal clarinet. Still uncertain about his place in the musical world, he thought he was more interested in opera than





symphonic music. But he stayed in New Orleans for five years, during which his older daughter, Jennifer, was born. During those five years, his ultimate career as a symphony player also was born.

After New Orleans, Combs spent another five years as principal clarinet in the Montreal Symphony Orchestra. “It was a great experience in a great town,” he said. “And with government support for orchestras that played Canadian music, I began to play a lot of contemporary music for the first time.”

In addition to his symphony positions, Combs played with the Marlboro String Festival during those years and toured with the Marlboro Festival Strings. Among the stops was the Auditorium Theatre in Chicago, where they accompanied a new soprano, Beverly Sills, in Schubert’s *Shepherd on the Rock*.

“I passed Orchestra Hall and saw the composers’ names inscribed on the exterior,” he said. “When I heard about an opening as assistant principal clarinet and E-flat clarinet in 1974, I auditioned.” The conductor was Sir Georg Solti, who appointed Combs principal clarinet on the retirement in 1978 of Clark Brody. “Solti trusted me musically, he listened, reacted, and was complimentary.” Combs memorably soloed with the CSO many years, including the Mozart *Clarinet Concerto* and the Corigliano *Clarinet Concerto* under Solti and the Copland *Clarinet Concerto* under guest conductor Erich Leinsdorf.

Whether playing with the CSO, with the Chicago Chamber Musicians (he calls the founding of the group more than 20 years ago, “my most significant musical moment”), other classical groups or his jazz group, Ears, Combs’s woodwind colleagues look to him as a mentor and inspiration.

Faculty member William Buchman, assistant bassoon at the CSO, said, “I met Larry Combs when I came to play with the CSO at Ravinia in 1991. Though I was only a 24-year-old sub, Larry treated me like a colleague. In contrast, the principal clarinet in Dallas, where I was working at the time, took six months to even learn my name. Everything Larry plays sounds as if he were born playing it. He is a true class act and absolutely one-of-a-kind.” Julie DeRoche, associate professor of clarinet and

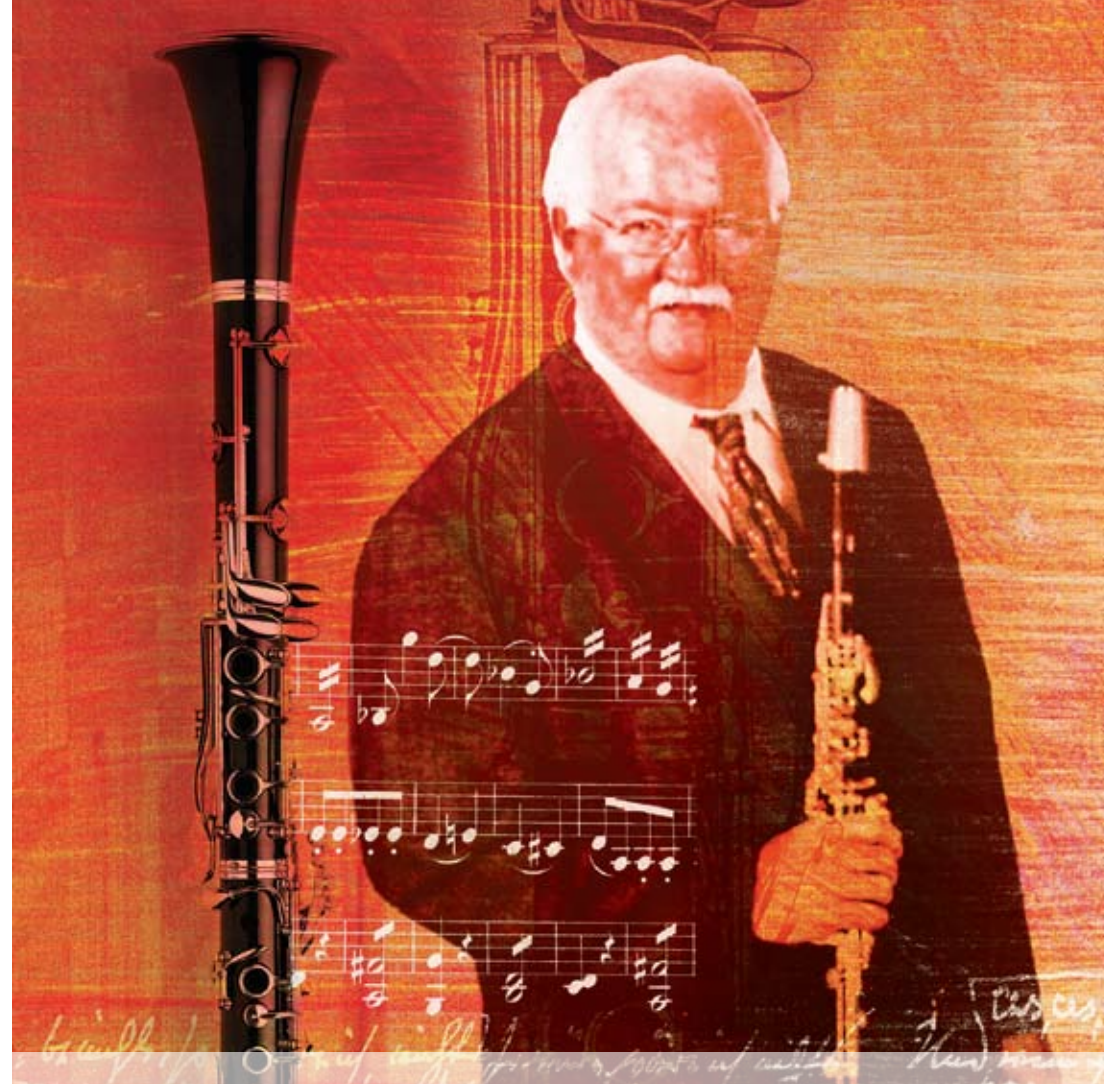
chair, Department of Performance Studies, said “I will never forget Larry’s performance of the Mozart *Clarinet Concerto* at a clarinet conference in 1991. How does a performer make such a well-known piece his own, while at the same time staying true to the composer — especially in front of hundreds of clarinetists? The right tempo, a few unusual ornaments, and a truly sincere approach, and these often-skeptical audience members were in tears. I will never forget the respect and awe he inspired that night. And he did it by focusing on Mozart rather than on the success of his performance. That is Larry to me.”

Other clarinetists are no exception. Before playing the Mozart *Clarinet Concerto* at a benefit for the Highland Park (Illinois) Strings this year, soloist David Shifrin watched a video of Combs playing the piece with the group 20 years earlier. After the video ended, Shifrin paid the ultimate compliment, blowing a kiss to the television screen.

Combs was a member of the Northwestern University School of Music faculty from 1974 to 1978, when he became CSO principal and decided “not to become too busy.” He joined the DePaul faculty in 1981.

“Teaching is an intensive learning experience. Trying to verbalize reinforces your own ideas,” Combs said. The teacher most influential for him with regard to his own teaching methods is Stanley Hasty, principal clarinet of the Rochester Philharmonic, who taught him at Eastman. “Teachers provide interpretation, technique, and articulation — you try for a reaction that’s something like, ‘Oh, that’s what he meant!’”

“In a nutshell, Larry Combs is, without any doubt, the biggest musical influence of my life,” said Daniel Won (MM ’03, Performer’s Certificate ’05), DePaul School of Music facilities coordinator. “Whenever I prepare for performances or auditions, I find myself going back to notes I took during my lessons with him, or listening to his famous CD, *Orchestral Excerpts for Clarinet*. I remember one time in the middle of a lesson, back in 2003, I told him my B-flat clarinet had too many cracks and I had given up sealing them with super glue. A few days later, he brought a new pair of professional model clarinets and asked me to try them. He said,



‘Well, you sound good on those. Keep them and bring them back whenever.’ Four years later, I still use them, everyday.”

Combs will retire from the CSO in June, after 35 years of “intensive work and thought.” He not only intends to remain at DePaul upon his retirement, he plans to spend more time, coaching chamber music ensembles. And his calendar for the rest of the year is quite full: including teaching and performing at festivals in Kansas City, Jackson Hole, Quebec, and Marlboro, and joining a European tour with the CSO in September.

He also plans more time with his wife, hornist Gail Williams, whom he met when she joined the CSO more than 20 years ago. She is a co-founder of the Chicago Chamber Musicians. The Combs have lived in northwest Evanston their entire married life. Their daughter, Elizabeth, is an event planner with the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Chicago, and their son, Michael, is a carpenter. Jennifer, his older daughter from his previous marriage, and her pianist husband live near Hartford, Connecticut, where she is a cellist with the Hartford Symphony Orchestra.

Combs and Williams, ardent opera-goers, also hope to find more time for the Lyric Opera of Chicago, where he favors the German composers — Mozart, Beethoven, and, “of course,” Wagner.

The original question remains: what of his early upbringing in Charleston, the coal and farm town, the beautiful, smelly mountain town, remain in his music? Perhaps it’s honesty and respect for others.

DeRoche said, “Musical interpretation is a true partnership between composer and musician. The performer’s question is, ‘What is this composer trying to say, and how do I express it?’ No performer that I have known is better at this than Larry. His rare combination of artistic integrity, personal confidence, and musical humility allows him to go beyond his own ego and put artistic interpretation first.” •

ROSALIE HARRIS, editor and writer of *Con Brio*, is president of Rosalie Harris:Creative Solutions, a writer and communications consultant.



# Unforgettable

BY ROSALIE HARRIS

*The diploma from DePaul might be hanging on the wall — or maybe stowed in a drawer somewhere. What is certain for many School of Music alumni is the memory — or perhaps more accurately, the constant presence — of a teacher who found imaginative and important ways to inspire musical quality and confidence.*

“It would be hard to capture just one moment in my two years at DePaul, as the entire two years was kind of an “ah-ha” moment for me,” said Mike W. Roylance (MM '03), now principal tuba, Boston Symphony Orchestra. “I remember that after one year after school, during summer break, I went back to listen to a recording I had made of myself preparing Wagner’s *Prelude to Die Meistersinger* for an audition, the year before I went to DePaul. My only means of recognizing the tuba player on the tape was because I had labeled it with my name and date on it. After one year’s time studying with Floyd Cooley, my playing had changed so much, from a fundamental side and musicianship side, that I didn’t recognize the player as myself. My wife, Amanda, who was listening from the other room, was shocked to find out that it was in fact me from only a year prior. She had heard my playing change throughout the year but did not realize how far I had actually come. I don’t think I could have accelerated my career as I did without DePaul and Chicago.”

James Quinn (BM '58, MM'63), is a retired administrator at City Colleges of Chicago, a DePaul University Distinguished Alumnus, advisor to the school of music, and co-composer of the perennial musical hit *Do Black Patent Leather Shoes Really Reflect Up?*, among other works. He said, “Back in 1955, when I was a music composition major at DePaul School, a very special thing happened ... Tom Fabish was appointed band master. I knew of him; he knew of me. He had allowed me to rehearse my first piece for concert band,

*WINDBLOWN*, which I composed while a senior at Leo High School for the Chicago Youth Orchestra concert band he conducted. He’d pronounced it the best piece he had ever heard by an amateur. I was complimented, but being just a kid, I was a little hurt by the ‘amateur’ label. Anyway, now there he was at DePaul and there I was, working constantly on composition, both inside and outside the curriculum.

“Very shortly after Tom’s arrival, I asked him if I could try out a new piece with the DePaul Band. There began a ritual that would last all my remaining years at the school. I’d simply go to Tom and ask, ‘Could I try something out Thursday?’ and he would reply ‘How much time do you need?’” The next thing would be me on the podium conducting and trying out whatever new work I was working on. No questions asked. During those years I premiered at least one new work in concert with the band at least once a year and sometimes more. I also tried out various other parts of pieces, completed or uncompleted. What a training ground! Without that special man and that special relationship I believe I would never have been able to achieve the learning curve that I did. The ultimate result was that in 1958 while I was still a senior at the DePaul School of Music, I was fortunate enough to become the youngest composer ever to win the highest professional award in band composition, the American Bandmaster’s Ostwald Award, for my work, *Portrait of the Land*. The work was premiered at the University of Illinois along with new works by Roy Harris, Robert Russell Bennett, and Ferde Grofé, and was subsequently published. As an added perk I even got to play double piano with Grofé and discuss his original arrangement of Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* with him. What a fantastic experience! I don’t believe that any of this would have been possible without the special relationship I was honored to have with Thomas F. Fabish.

“My growth as a musician under Don DeRoche’s direction is something that will remain dear to me for many years to come.”







"In 1965, continuing this pattern with Tom and DePaul, I was able to mount the 30-minute *Requiem for a Slave* at WTTW/Channel 11-Chicago, using members of the DePaul Concert Band, Chorus and two soloists, with choreography by Gus Giordano. The work won an Emmy Award and a Special Blue Ribbon Judges' Citation from the Chicago Chapter of the American Academy of Television Arts and Sciences and was shown throughout the United States on what is now PBS. In 1971, I composed and mounted *Ritual-D* for expanded jazz orchestra at WTTW using members of the DePaul Concert Band, again with choreography by Giordano. The piece was very well received and subsequently broadcasted on the entire PBS network. The 'special relationship' had struck again!"

"Looking back at my years at DePaul, I recall many 'magical moments' in my private lessons, chamber ensembles, and large ensembles," said bass clarinetist Paul R. Demers (BM '92, MM '94, Performance Certificate '97.) "However, a prominent memory that comes to mind is the first time I experienced playing in the DePaul Wind Ensemble under director Donald DeRoche. The ensemble consisted of all of the top wind and brass students at DePaul, and I was a young student sitting in back of a very talented clarinet section, taking it all in. We were rehearsing the *Concerto for Wind Orchestra* by Nikolai Lopatnikoff. It was quite a busy piece, which showcased many of the sections. The precise level of accuracy and musicianship excited and intimidated me at the same time. I found myself enraptured by what was going on around me. It was those early experiences that truly built an affinity toward wind music that continues to stay with me today. The high level of wind playing provided a wonderful foundation

from which I built a professional career, first with 'The President's Own' Marine Band, and now The Philadelphia Orchestra. My growth as a musician in Wind Ensemble under Don's direction is something that will remain dear to me for many years to come."

"The one truly magical moment that I can sift from all the fading moments in my time at DePaul came when the orchestra played Tchaikovsky's *Fifth Symphony* my senior year," said Oto Carillo (BM '93), utility horn, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and a member of the DePaul horn faculty. "For those familiar with the work, the second movement features perhaps the most lyrical and recognizable horn solo in all of the repertory. I was thrilled to have the chance to perform it and terrified of the reality of playing it. My teacher at the time, Jon Boen, had instructed me diligently, taking great pains to temper my youthful zeal and ground my playing with more thought and polish. I clearly remember him stating that the terror of the solo lay in piercing the silence created by the suspended, hushed strings chords that served as bedrock to the horn melody. Jon urged me to allow for these strings chords to usher in my own sounds so that the change in color would be bright yet seamless, and would seem as if I had been already playing. By working on the volume of my attack and shaping the phrase with its up and down volume changes, Jon brought me to notice my sound not just at the start of the note, but also within the body and tail end of the note, and how all of these affected the creative line of the phrase. This got my musical mind aware of each miniscule moment of my playing. Being so concentrated left little or no room for nerves to sabotage any part of the performance. I then simply immersed myself in the beauty of the moment, having confidence that this well rehearsed technical blueprint would guide the actual production of the notes. The result is now preserved on crude cassette and it gives testament to this musician who was a mere boy then, but who at least came across as having more to say than just 'let's try and get through this.' Now that I teach side by side with Jon in group studio class, I am once again confronted with his ready and indelible words as we try and coax musical sentences, paragraphs, and, eventually, stories from our young group, in the hope that each one will eventually be able to play this same solo or live through a similar experience and emerge rewarded." •







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