The Festival for Creative Pianists

Arthur Houle, Founder & Director

Judges & Director Program

featuring John Salmon, the festival's annual judge

Mesa State College
Moss Performing Arts Center Recital Hall
Grand Junction, CO

Friday, March 27, 2009
7:30 P.M.

Part 1: John Salmon
Professor of Piano, University of North Carolina, Greensboro

Is It Bach? Brubeck? Or Bubba*? Round II

Dr. Salmon will present, in his inimitable words, "a capricious potpourri including selections by J. S. Bach (*C Major Invention, F Major Prelude from WTC I*), Dave Brubeck (*Two-Part Contention, Bach Again*), and John Salmon (inchoate mumblings), stitched together with a variety of *Übergang* and *Eingang* figurations (which, hopefully, will not cause the public to seek the *Ausgang*)."

*Explanatory Note: bubba = a thumping but genial Southerner, in this case, your pianist, born and raised in Fort Worth, Texas.

Part 2: Arthur Houle **(see notes on p. 2)**

Original composition:

Sonata Americana (2008-2009)
1. Allegro giocoso
2. Andante cantabile e poco rubato
3. Rondo: Allegretto vivace

10-minute Intermission

Part 3: John Salmon (see Salmon article, pp. 4 & 5)

Mucking Up the Masters

What is he doing?! That's not what Beethoven wrote! Chopin had more taste than that!! Which Urtext is he using? How dare he!!

Part 4: (see notes on p. 3)

Scaramouche Suite for Two Pianos, Op. 165b (1937) Darius Milhaud (1892-1974)
III. Braziliera; Mouvement de Samba

Monte Atkinson and Arthur Houle, pianists

Part 5: Surprise finale by John Salmon and Stuart Isacoff

To be announced

Notes by Houle:

America has often been referred to as a "melting pot." ***Sonata Americana*** blends European classical influences (especially Mozart, Clementi, Haydn, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schubert, Kuhlau, and Chopin) with American themes and perhaps a touch of Aaron Copland.

The work was written between November 1, 2008 and February 2, 2009. The ideas, however, had been stewing for quite some time. The first movement is built on a theme written 5/28/98. It was originally intended to be entitled "The Chattanooga Sonatina," since the principal theme popped into my head while on an interview at the University of Tennessee in Chattanooga. The Chopinesque second movement theme was sketched 12/11/05 as a song ballad. The third movement is a rondo whose main theme was inspired mostly by Haydn, who often wrote similar cheerful, upbeat last movements to his many sonatas. In the intervening rondo themes I quote 12 famous American themes (one of which is also briefly quoted in the first movement). The rondo movement also quotes elements of the other two movements, giving the work a degree of cyclical unity. In the closing measures of the last movement you will hear a brief quote of Mozart's famous theme to "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" (literally, "A Little Night Music") - which, in hindsight, reveals the subconscious rhythmic genesis for the whole sonata.

I wish to thank my colleagues in the Grand Junction Music Teachers Association, who provided the incentive to bring this piece to fruition. They invited me to give a presentation on how to write a sonatina last November. While preparing for this I thought, "How can I talk on this topic if I've never written a sonatina?" So, over the course of a frantic weekend, I set out to write the first and second movements, which were more or less completed in time for the presentation. The GJMTA teachers insisted, however, that it is a sonata, not a sonatina. The subsequent completion of the third movement, with its Mendelssohn-like virtuosic ending, certainly settled the issue. Nevertheless, the piece retains, I believe, the childlike quality of a sonatina.

Darius Milhaud, teacher of the legendary Dave Brubeck, was a prolific French composer whose music was characterized by jazz influences and the use of polytonality (simultaneous use of more than one key). The American Heritage dictionary defines Scaramouche as "a stock character in commedia dell'arte [a form of improvisational theatre] and pantomime, depicted as a boastful coward or buffoon." Rafael Sabatini (1875-1950) wrote an historical romantic adventure epic novel entitled *Scaramouche*, published in 1921. It tells the story of a young aristocrat during the French Revolution who continually changes character – from a roughish buffoon to a refined expert swordsman. While some have drawn a connection between this book and Milhaud's ***Scaramouche Suite****,* the title actually takes its name from the Théâtre Scaramouche. This is what Milhaud himself related:

> *"...I composed a piano work that gave me more than usual trouble. It was a suite for two pianos, to be played by Ida Jankelevitch and Marcelle Meyer. I took some passages from two sets of incidental music for the stage, and called the mixture Scaramouche. At once Deiss offered to publish it. I advised him against it, saying that no one would play it. But he was an original character who published only works that he liked. He happened to like Scaramouche, and insisted on having his way. ...he was right, for while sales of printed music were everywhere encountering difficulties, several printings were made, and Deiss took delight in informing me: 'The Americans are asking for five hundred copies, and one thousand are being asked for elsewhere.'"*

Given how thoroughly pianistic the *Scaramouche Suite* is (the work is a popular staple among duo pianists), I was surprised to find this connection to earlier incidental orchestral music. But then, Milhaud was a superb pianist as well as composer and arranger.

Just to clarify the aforementioned comments by Milhaud: After he wrote the incidental music, Milhaud was under pressure by the renowned piano pedagogue Marguerite Long (1874-1966) to compose music for two of her former students, Marcelle Meyer and Ida Jankelevitch, to play at the 1937 International Exposition in Paris.

The first and third movements of *Scaramouche* were based partly on incidental music that Milhaud had written for Charles Vildrac's 1937 theatrical revival of *Le médecin volant (The Flying Doctor)*, a short landmark farcical play written circa 1645-50 by the actor and playwright Molière (birth name Jean-Baptiste Poquelin: 1622-1673). The play was presented at the short-lived Théâtre Scaramouche (located in a small room behind the Theater des Champs-Elysees in Paris), which specialized in productions for children. Molière was one of the greatest masters of French comedy. The original premiere of *The Flying Doctor* in the 17th century made theatre history and was received with great acclaim. *The Flying Doctor* poked fun at the bourgeoisie by portraying farfetched situations, slapstick comedy and unbelievable disguises; these theatrical depictions seem especially akin to the first movement of the *Scaramouche Suite*.

The third movement of *Scaramouche* is a samba, which is defined by Webster as "a Brazilian dance of African origin characterized by a dip and upspring with a bending of the knee at each beat of the music." Milhaud had lived in Brazil for almost two years (1917-1918) and, immediately upon arrival, commented on the Carnaval in Rio's "crazy gaiety that possessed the whole town." Later, in 1922, he traveled to the United States and was captivated by Harlem's street jazz.

Due to the immense popularity of the *Scaramouche Suite*, Milhaud also arranged it for saxophone and orchestra (Op. 165c; the orchestra part is often played as a piano reduction), and, at Benny Goodman's request, for clarinet and orchestra (Op. 165d). Many other arrangements (not by Milhaud) have followed.

This editorial is from The College Music Society March 2002 Newsletter (Electronic Version) and is reprinted with kind permission of CMS.

==========

"URTEXT, QUE ME VEUX-TU?"

by John Salmon
University of North Carolina - Greensboro

Scholars of sonata form will pardon my paraphrase of Fontenelle's eighteenth-century query, "Sonata, what do you want of me?," reformulated here for present-day performers as "Urtext, what do you want of me?"

We live in an age that values the Urtext, and that is a good thing. While I cannot speak for other instrumentalists (oboists, trumpeters, guitarists, and all those that make up the study of performance at the college level), I know that pianists are very concerned with the editions from which they learn or teach masterworks. Gone are the days when piano teachers assign a Beethoven sonata without discussion of the recommended edition(s).

Never mind, for a moment, that the precise function and format of an Urtext edition differ from publisher to publisher. Some editions include extensive annotation and information on sources; others offer virtually no added commentary -- let alone that two Urtext editions of the same piece are likely to differ, sometimes substantially. Reading of texts to determine a composer's intentions, to make interpretative decisions, and to express what is written and connoted, isn't for the faint of heart or for those who fear exploring murky areas.

Yet I perceive, at least among piano teachers, a certain overvaluing of the Urtext, as if "textual fidelity" were an absolute, and tampering with the text were a sacrilege. In my view, the Urtext is nothing more than a fertile bed from which all kinds of textual manipulations and free fantasy can sprout. Imagination and the id must be at the heart of any truly compelling performance (bolstered, to be sure, by left-brained activity, such as comparing texts and studying style). This includes the possibility of changing notes, if the situation warrants, or actually improvising.

Long before the National Association of Schools of Music decided that our music students needed to have some exposure to the practice of improvising music, most musicians of every culture have improvised. In the Western canon, it is worth recalling that many great composers were also great improvisers, including J. S. Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, and Liszt.

Every now and then, a student shows me a critique from some well-meaning judge who noted in the student's performance an omission of a "standard ornament" in a Bach invention. Alas, we live in an age of literalism! Far more perverse, in my estimation, is to perform Bach's inventions (and suites and toccatas) always with the same ornamentation. Assuming Bach had time to perform his works more than once, it is conceivable that he would have changed them at every performance. Evidence thereof exists in the 1723 variant of his C Major Invention, where Bach replaced triplets with sixteenth notes (see Alfred Publishing Co. Edition of the complete Two-Part Inventions).

Salmon continued…

Or what about Mozart, who sometimes barely had time to write down the notes before a first performance -- particularly of the piano concertos, expecting to fill in at the moment certain Eingang (lead-in) and Durchgang (passing tone) passages, not to mention complete cadenzas?

Even Beethoven, who made his mark in Vienna first as an improviser, was a notable "adder of notes" to his own compositions, as Czerny relates in his "Anecdotes and Notes About Beethoven." This makes Czerny's later admonition highly ironic that "the player must by no means allow himself to alter the composition, nor to make any addition or abbreviation." Perhaps Czerny was still smarting from that 1816 letter he received from Beethoven, chiding the young Czerny for having changed Beethoven's written score. Surely Beethoven wasn't pooh-poohing the whole idea of tampering with the text, only Czerny's unimaginative brutish efforts.

And Chopin's notorious habit of allowing varying versions of his works to be published probably reflects his own improvisational disposition. He was forever changing his mind about fioritura ("flowering") flourishes. I see no reason not to experiment with my own versions of, say, the various repeated episodes of Chopin's B Major Nocturne, Op. 9, No. 3. If Chopin experimented with his own works, why shouldn't I?

"Ah, but that would require erudition, taste, and a knowledge of keyboard harmony," you may retort collectively. Hmm. Fancy that! Imagine seeing that dominant chord in third inversion in bar 34 of Bach's E Major Sinfonia and knowing that you can add, among many other possibilities, a descending and ascending scale in the soprano voice, a little lead-in, connecting to bar 35. What a triumph of stylistic and theoretical awareness: a celebration of imagination!

There are several philosophical subtexts to these suggestions -- for one, that the "work of art," at least in the realm of musical composition, is not the score but the performed piece, perhaps differing at times from the printed page. Notice too that this argument gives hierarchical primacy to the performer over the composer, or at least equal partnership, in making the music come to life. In this regard, I imagine that the relationship of composer to performer is much more akin to the relationship of playwright to director-actor. Every actor who has ever performed a role knows that absolute "textual fidelity" is a myth, that phrases and words can be changed to make a more powerful presentation. To the question "How has Tennessee Williams survived all those permutations of his original script?" must be answered "Only with those vital actors and their 'permutations' who take risks and bring the play to life with spontaneity and conviction!"

A work of art isn't some immutable Platonic ideal. The music isn't on the page. It is in the air, filtered through the performer's imagination. Don't tell me not to enter the compositional world of Scarlatti, Ravel, and even present-day composer Lowell Liebermann -- all of whom wrote music of improvisational character. I once asked composer Kenneth Frazelle if he minded if I (or other pianists) were to change his score. He replied, "If it makes the piece better" -- a challenging answer, to be sure. But why shouldn't performers know as much about the pieces they play as the composers who wrote them? That immersion, including the freedom to change notes, redefines our relation to the Urtext, even as it injects the interpreter's art with a new vitality.

==========

Biographies of the festival judges:

John Salmon holds B.M. and B.A. (philosophy) degrees from Texas Christian University, the "Solistendiplom" from the Freiburg Hochschule für Musik, the M.M. degree from the Juilliard School, and the D.M.A. from the University of Texas at Austin. His awards include a fellowship from The Beethoven Foundation (known nowadays as the American Pianists Association), the Premio Jaén, the Loren Eiseley Memorial Award from the University of Maryland Piano Competition, and the Gina Bachauer Memorial Award from the Juilliard School. Salmon has performed in solo and orchestral appearances in the United States, Central America, and Europe. He has recorded for Radio Suisse Romande, RAI Italian Radio, Spanish National Radio, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, WFMT Radio in Chicago, and C-Span and PBS television. Salmon is also active as a jazz pianist, performs regularly with the jazz quintet Spectrum, and has released CD's of the music of Dave Brubeck. He is founder and former director of the annual "Focus on Piano Literature" symposium at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro.

Stuart Isacoff is a pianist, composer and writer, and the founding editor of the magazine Piano Today. Mr. Isacoff is the author of the highly acclaimed Temperament: How Music Became a Battleground for the Great Minds of Western Civilization. A winner of the prestigious ASCAP Deems Taylor Award for excellence in writing about music, he is a frequent contributor to The Wall Street Journal and many music periodicals. Isacoff's piano recitals often combine classical repertoire with jazz improvisation, demonstrating the threads that connect musical works created centuries and continents apart. In addition to obtaining degrees in both Philosophy and Music Composition, Mr. Isacoff was a private piano student of jazz great Sir Roland Hanna, and has taught improvisation on the college level. He currently teaches both the graduate course in the philosophy of music and a survey course in the history of Western music at the Purchase College Conservatory of Music (State University of New York), where he also serves as the music teacher for the graduate dance students.

Monte Atkinson has been Director of Choral Activities at Mesa State College since 1985. He oversees choral music education, teaches piano, and conducts the Mesa State Concert Choir, Chamber Choir and the Western Colorado Chorale. Choirs under his direction have performed with the Denver Chamber Orchestra, Mexico National Symphony, Vancouver Symphony, annually with the Grand Junction Symphony Orchestra, and the Mesa State Symphony Orchestra. He has conducted the Mesa State Chamber Choir in performance throughout the United States and Canada, Europe and Great Britain. Last February, Dr. Atkinson made his first appearance as guest conductor at Carnegie Hall; the program included the Mesa State College Chamber Choir and the Western Colorado Chorale. An accomplished pianist, he holds a Bachelors degree in choral music, piano and strings from Utah State University. His Masters in Choral Conducting and D.M.A. in Choral Music were earned at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Dr. Atkinson was the 1999 recipient of the Distinguished Faculty Award.

This festival is part of a growing movement whose battle-cry is, in John Salmon's words, "to loosen the strictures of perfectionism and literalism that have gradually eviscerated the interpreter's art in this age of 'note-perfect' recordings and competitions, and to reemphasize the beautiful, the imaginative."

We are grateful for the contributions by the following individuals,
without whom this festival would not be possible:

Evelyn Billberg
On behalf of Esther Boelter
Paul C. Collins, M.D.
Laine Cross
Juli Draney
Azam and Arthur Houle
Bijan and Jenny Houle
John and Linda Stedman
Frank & Jayne Steuart
Susan Torgrude, M.S.
(Environmental Researcher/Planner, BOELTER DESIGN GROUP, Inc.)

Thanks also to **Mesa State College**, the **Grand Junction Music Teachers Association**, & to **J. B. Hart Music** for their sponsorship.

YAMAHA PIANOS & CLAVINOVAS
FENDER & MARTIN GUITARS
AMP's • DRUMS • PA's
KORG KEYBOARDS
417 Main St., Grand Junction, CO 81501
(970) 242-9282
1-800-310-9282

Thanks also to our volunteers:

Evelyn Billberg
Britni Bryan

We also appreciate the day-to-day support and tireless contributions of our music department chair, **Calvin Hofer**, and our fine arts administrative assistant, **Lyn Ross**.

Finally, a hearty thanks goes to **Frank & Jayne Steuart** for their hospitality in hosting John Salmon.

Festival participants: Please don't forget to sign in before and after this program.

Upcoming: • Winners' Recital tomorrow evening, Sat., March 28, 7:30 P.M., MPAC Recital Hall ($10/$8/$5)
• Guest Artist Ryan Anthony, trumpet, will be in concert with Arthur Houle on Saturday, April 4 at 7:30 P.M., MPAC Recital Hall ($15/$10/$5).