

Iowa Composers Forum Fall News letter

Member News:

Jerry Owen, Alma A. Turechek Professor of Music at Coe College, has been commissioned by Red Cedar Chamber Music of Marion, Iowa, to compose a trio for flute, guitar and viola. The four movement work is based on Czech folk songs originally compiled in a collection by Alma Turechek, coincidentally the person for whom Coe College has named the endowed the professorship held by Dr. Owen. The work will be premiered at the National Czech and Slovak Museum in Cedar Rapids October 19th, 8:00 p.m. featuring Jan Boland, flute, John Dowdall, guitar, and Suzanne Wagor, viola. The commission was made possible in part by a project grant from the Iowa Arts Council. Jerry Owen, in conjunction with Coe College, will release a new CD recording of the music commission by the College in 2001 for its Sesquicentennial celebration. The 14-movement, 40-minute work entitled "One By One" is for orchestra, mixed chorus, soprano and bass soloists, and organ. The texts are written by authors associated with Coe College. The CD will available in two versions: the first is a single CD and is the music performance with the texts being read before each number by their respective authors; the second is a two-CD set and is the complete 100-minute celebration, including honors presentations and testimonials. Availability: soon, from the Coe College Public Relations Office.

Jerre Tanner has been awarded the commission of the State of North Carolina in the second round of the American

Composers Forum Continental Harmony commissioning projects. The work is a 15-minute theme and variations for concert band composed for the Gaston County Symphonic Band. "Variations on an American Naval Theme" is written in honor of North Carolina favorite son Admiral Charles Wilkes, a colorful and controversial 19th century Naval officer. Among Wilkes's accomplishments which are portrayed in the music is his leadership position in the American Exploring Expedition of 1838 – 42 (artifacts from which form the basis of the collection of the Smithsonian Institution), and the Trent Affair in the American Civil War. Sponsors for the commissioning project are the Gaston County Museum of Art and History and the Schiele Museum of Natural History. Both museums will mount exhibitions on Wilkes which will run concurrently with the premiere of the music in February 2003.

Tracey Rush has received 4 commissions for this school year: On October 4th, her "Blessed is the Man" will be premiered by the Schola Cantorum of the University of St. Francis in Joliet, IL. The work was commissioned by Dr. Pat Brannon, choir director, in honor of the inauguration of the new college president. Later in October, the band and choir of Western Dubuque will premiere the alma mater commissioned in memory of their former band director who was killed in an automobile accident two years ago. The music department of Middleton High School (near Madison, WI) has commissioned a work for band, orchestra and choir to celebrate the opening of the school's new auditorium; that work will be premiered February 11. Finally, Tracey has been invited to be the guest composer/clinician for Des Moines' District Fifth Grade Orchestra Festival on April 15 .

from **Kathleen Ryan Clute**: In 2001 my piano piece "Spare Change" took first place in the Music Teachers Association of California Composers Today composition contest--I won actual money! (I sent that in last year by email, but that's when the computer crashed and everything was lost.) And this year my piano piece "Something Water, Something Light" took 2nd place in the same competition. More actual money! I am working on a new album, to be titled "The Pomegranate Trail" and I hope to be ready to record it in April. I am the president of the Contra Costa branch of the MTAC, so my time is a bit more scheduled than I am used to. Composing is going slowly, therefore. Otherwise, my husband & I are well & happy and, I think, still exemplary citizens! We bought a house last fall--we'll be staying in California, apparently.

Bonnie Johansen-Werner will be one of eight composers attending the Melodious Accord Composers Workshop in November. The Composers Workshop offers the opportunity for three days of work with Alice Parker and a small group of composer colleagues at Ms. Parker's studio in Hawley, Massachusetts. Composers present examples of their works that serve as a basis for discussions of score reading, analysis, technical problems, and other questions. Ms. Johansen-Werner is the Composer-in-Residence for the Dubuque District of The United Methodist Church and the McCosh Assistant Professor of Music at Upper Iowa University.

Jon Chenette's "Elegy and Affirmation," for cello and piano, premiered at the Blanden Memorial Art Museum in Fort Dodge on September 22. Part of the Iowa Arts Council's American

Spirit project initiative to reflect on the aftermath of September 11, the piece grew out of an interview with the mother of a September 11 victim, who spoke at the premiere. Chenette's "Look how the pale queen" for mezzo-soprano, Renaissance flute, lute, and bass viol has been released on a Riverrun CD, recorded by the London-based early music ensemble Virelai.

from **Robert C. Jones** : My "Symphonic Sketch" was commissioned last year by the Santa Fe Youth Symphony and received its premier and several other performances last spring. The music director of the youth symphony is Jan McDonald, who grew up in a small southern Iowa town, but the name escapes me right now. Also, my "Four Short Pieces for Orchestra: Pictures From Our Home" will receive its premier performance by the Santa Fe Community Orchestra in February, 2003.

Member Profile: by Ralph Kendrick

:For this issue of the newsletter, I had the pleasure of interviewing Alan Schmitz, an associate professor of music at UNI and a current co-chair of the ICF board.

RSK: Talk a little bit about the journey you took in becoming a composer...

AS: I got started in music by taking guitar lessons...and I don't think it occurred to me to do anything with composition right at first, but later in my lessons, my teacher suggested that I write some songs.... I was into rock music and at that time, the sixties, that was the thing to do. Later on in high school, I would take the song I had written and arrange it for kids I knew. It's interesting, because I still like to do this sort of thing. Anyway, through that, I began to learn more about

writing for different instruments. At the university of New Mexico, I took a few years of music theory then began taking composition lessons. Eventually, I moved away from writing in a pop style to things for the standard classical ensembles.

RSK: What was your musical diet when you were growing up and what's it like now?

AS: Well, they're completely different. My family is not musical in the sense that it is now...my wife and I are both musicians, our children are musicians. But my mother wanted all of the kids to have lessons and my very first lessons were on piano at about 10 - those didn't last very long. I was 14 when my guitar was purchased and *that*, was when my life started. After I'd had lessons for 2 years... they hired me to teach lessons and that was the other part of waking up.

I found teaching such an exciting thing. I went the education route... I see so many people going, 'ok, I'm going to have this group,' and I had bands too, but you'd always have fights, and then your drummer (or someone else) was out of there. That's why I stayed with the academic side of it, there's more stability. And, new music is a little more welcome in the academic world because you can write pieces for friends or colleagues who are interested in playing them. Those friendships dictate what I write to a great extent.

RSK: Your music has been performed in Romania, Russia and Western Europe, how did those opportunities come about?

AS: Good question! Friends and relatives really. For example, I was asked to write a piece for flute, a very mellow thing, a nocturne for a friend of mine, Terry Kallenburg, while I was living in Alaska. She frequently went to Russia and performed. So, she asked me for an accessible piece, and when it was finished, she liked it a lot. She played it in Russia and

Alaska quite a few times. I submitted this piece to a call for flute music by Capstone records by the #1 flautist in Poland, Grzegorz Olkiewicz, and the composition wound up on a CD of his performances. A number of other pieces have been performed in this way... as I mentioned, my children are musicians, so I have a tradition where I write a piece for each of my kids for their recitals. So two of my sons, a trombonist and pianist, performed a piece while in Russia. The other thing is with colleagues. For example, David Rachor, the bassoonist professor here, is in this organization that plays in a good bit of Europe... so a bit of my stuff gets done in France, Romania, and Germany too. I've had a couple of commissions for choral pieces by the Anchorage children's chorus and those were done at a competition in Wales.

RSK: I've talked to many composers regarding the relationships between their personalities and their music, in what ways does your music reflect your personality and are there any traits it does not reflect?

AS: That's very difficult to answer, it depends on the piece... it isn't just the personality of the composer. A commission is written for an organization or a certain group of people. Sometimes, what I'm really trying to get to is the personality of the performer I'm writing for. David Rachor seems to like these minimalist things ... now I'm working on a guitar concerto for Todd Seeyle and I know he's not a big fan of minimalism, so I'm not using that style. But, there are limits to that sort of thinking, you don't want to kowtow too much.

RSK: Is that sort of an investment in the relationship?

AS: It's a way to get them to play it. I've had the experience of writing a piece blindly for a choreographer, but she didn't like

the piece much. They honored the contract, they paid me and hired performers, they choreographed and performed the piece. But I know she didn't like it. So maybe that was my personality there in the music (*laughs*). But, there is a voice aspect to music, and that to me, is extremely important. I don't recall discussing this with any of my teachers, but I do talk about it with my students. That is, you should be striving for your own voice, your own sound. When you first compose, you are kind of lost, really for some time. I don't think I had a voice until I was in my forties. Sure there's something back there, but it develops over time.

RSK: In listening to a number of your pieces, specifically *Dance and Dream Sequence* and *Spiritual Excursion*, I was struck with their sort of dreamy, and subtle nature. Is that some sort of reflection of your personality, are you a dreamer?

AS: I must be. When composing, I spend a lot of time thinking about the music, really, so I think that part of it could be viewed as being dreamy. Coming from a non-musical background of very practical people, you know, a bunch of farmers, auto mechanics and house wives, no one else really seems to do that. Back to this personality thing, it is there, it is going to be in the music. I can be very silly and jokish and I can be extremely serious, and taking this kind of aesthetic, or outside of the practical world experience, so seriously, and to spend so much time writing music and getting everything notated just right is what is so important to me.

RSK: Was most of your training in serialism?

AS: Not really. My main teacher, Robert Moevs, did not follow serialism quite as tightly. I also studied with a teacher who did, but Moevs wrote very dissonant music, constructed with intervallic and chromatic relationships. He felt that

serialism was kind of controlling so, he didn't push for that... but he did insist that I write things based on certain intervals and to avoid tonality. That's hard to do, especially at first because tonality is so ingrained in you. I got into serialism just to see how it worked and I've continued with that. *7 Images for Guitar* is strictly serial and fairly easy to play, especially compared to something by Milton Babbitt or Boulez. So, I take a softer approach to it, but I still use those systems. The guitar concerto I'm working on now combines some of these different things. It has sections with 12 tone music, and some of those sections use a tonal melody with 12 tone harmony. I use chromatic shifting to get the melody to work with the harmony, so the melody is recognizable in a sense. So, different things that I've used before are coming together. It has taken me many years to get there, I always kept those things quite separate from each other thinking they had to be, but they don't at all.

RSK: I would generalize that the majority of non-minimalistic music I hear composed recently, has sort of done away with the Theme and Variations model and yet I hear this form in a number of your pieces... could you talk a little bit about the use of repetition in your works?

AS: It depends on how a piece develops, I think I use a lot more repetition now than I used to. I feel repetition of some type is absolutely necessary, otherwise, there's nothing for the listener to get hold of or follow and they'll become bored. With too much repetition, a piece becomes boring too. The whole String Trio was based on one melody and I modify it so that sometimes it appears in a lilting 6/8, which gives it a completely different flavor but still, with the same pitch

content in different keys. My music looks so simple rhythmically and I think that's its style. I look at my music sometimes and think it needs to look more modern with meter changes but, I'm quite a bit more conservative. It doesn't have to be so damn hard that only two people on the planet can perform it - that's the problem with Babbitt and Boulez, or many composers we admire, there's only a handful of people that can play it and only a few more that can enjoy it. So, that is something I've reacted to. I've found when I would write something like that... people wouldn't even play or like to perform it. I think I've found this in between place where my music is not simplistic like popular music, but it's not really complex either.

2002 ICF Student Composers Competition Results

Judged by ICF Board members Jerry Owen and Josh Reznicow

Junior Division:

1st place

Michael Gilbertson

Dubuque

Ballo da Burla (piano 4-hands)

Teacher: Tracey Rush

2nd place

Katie Carnes and Andy Fick

River Valley Middle School

The Debate (xylophone and piano)

Teacher: Rebecca Meyer

Senior Division:

1st place

Nathan Chenette

Grinnell High School

Lovel's Song (SATB)

Teacher: Jonathan Chenette

2nd place

Brandon Clary

Okoboji High School

Freedom (SATB + pno)

Teacher: Jackie Bryan

3rd place

Derek Jenkins

Dubuque

Two Short Pieces for Bassoon (bassoon and piano)

Teacher: Tracey Rush

Honorable Mention:

Jonathan Tschiggfrie

Dubuque

Driving (MIDI) Teacher:

Tracey Rush

Tony Wirtz

Belmond-Klemme High School

This Day (SATB + piano)

Teacher: Jackie Burk