

# A Full-body Instrument

by Michelle Jones

*Voice majors at Blair learn the details—both inside and out—that make the singer*

**M**usically and academically talented, having made it through Blair's strenuous audition process, first-year voice majors may be in for a few surprises when they arrive at Blair. The students may find themselves asked to reconsider how they do everything that got them there in the first place. That's because their voice instructors are determined to transform the young students

into well-trained musicians capable of gaining admittance to the nation's most prestigious graduate music programs.

Jonathan Retzlaff, associate professor and department chair; Gayle Shay, associate professor and Vanderbilt Opera Theatre director; and Amy Jarman, senior lecturer in voice, begin by steeping students in the principles of the 19th century Italian or bel canto school

of singing, which emphasizes principles of integrating the physiology of singing (breath, posture and vowel formation) with the development and care of one's voice. "Our backgrounds synthesized into believing that this is really the most effective set of tools for singers," Retzlaff says. "What the Italians were doing hundreds of years ago by ear ... has been borne out by science and spectrum analysis."



Four-time Grammy Award winner Dawn Upshaw has sung twice at Blair in concerts sponsored by the Mary Cortner Ragland Master Series Fund, which brings internationally known vocalists to Blair each year. Other artists who have sung at Blair as part of the Ragland Master Series have included Renée Fleming, Ian Bostridge, Bo Skovhus and Jennifer Larmore.

“Jonathan, Gayle and I are very technically oriented in terms of the ‘how’ of singing,” Jarman says. While Jarman and her colleagues don’t necessarily have to unteach things the students may have previously learned, they often must redirect their students’ ideas about singing. “I’m asking them to think differently about what they’re doing with their tongue or their jaw, how they are creating space inside their mouth, or what

An important part of Retzlaff’s instruction is teaching young singers to respect their vocal folds and how to properly prepare them for performance or practice. It’s all the more difficult given the elusive nature of some of the muscles involved in singing.

“Most of the [first-year students] don’t know where their diaphragm is, or that you can’t feel it,” Retzlaff says. “To ‘sing from your diaphragm’ is really scientific-

continuously lengthening the spine, of ‘never arriving at a posture,’” Shay explains. She finds the concept particularly useful for students who are unaware of how to use their bodies to enhance their singing. “They think their instrument is just here,” she says, pointing to her throat, “but it’s actually their whole body.”

Still, Shay acknowledges the Alexander Technique isn’t for every person or every body, and that’s fine. Shay and her



Master classes are an important addition to regular classroom instruction, providing students the opportunity to work with a diverse range of professionals. In a January 2008 master class at Blair, mezzo-soprano Jennifer Larmore works with Tierney Bamrick, BMus’09, now in the graduate voice program at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

they’re thinking about when they take a breath,” Jarman says.

Jennifer McGuire, lecturer in opera and vocal coaching, works with students to address issues of language diction, performance practice, style and the art of collaborative music-making. Her work emphasizes a level of polish and preparation that is graduate level in expectation. As part of her preparation before meeting with students, McGuire practices singing their parts to make note of where they’ll need to breathe and whether they need more time to voice certain words.

cally impossible ... it’s an involuntary muscle,” he explains. “We do have to learn about it and its interaction with the abdominal muscles.”

Shay uses a small skeleton and anatomical charts of the larynx to help clarify such points for students. The skeleton is also useful when talking about body awareness work, such as the Alexander Technique, and its focus on proper spinal alignment.

Named for Shakespearean actor Frederick Matthias Alexander (1869-1955), the technique is based on the idea of con-

colleagues devote a lot of time to finding the best way for each student to achieve his or her personal best. This might even mean helping them to find ways of keeping music in their lives should they decide not to pursue a performing career—or even a degree in music.

Retzlaff, Shay and Jarman make no bones about the competitive, low-odds nature of a performance career, repeatedly stressing the discipline and dedication required to succeed at the undergraduate level, let alone anything beyond that. To do well at competitions, in graduate

“Part of our job is to know—particularly with young, big, mature voices—that it’s not appropriate for them to be singing heavy repertoire. It’s as important for a teacher to say ‘no’ as it is to say ‘yes’ sometimes.”

—Jonathan Retzlaff



One venue from which Blair students receive stage experience is Vanderbilt Opera Theatre (see p.7). The 2007 production of Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* was presented with a ‘60s counterculture theme for sets and costumes.

school or to maintain a professional career requires a certain amount of tunnel vision, Retzlaff’s says.

One of the biggest challenges the voice instructors face, Retzlaff says, is teaching students to be patient, an increasingly difficult task given the instant-gratification nature of our society. Google, *American Idol* and other aspects of popular culture have led kids to expect what they want, when they want it.

“Singing just doesn’t work that way,” Retzlaff says. “You have to be willing to learn to love that solitary time in the practice room, and it takes years. There’s no amount of technology out there that can speed up your physiological process. It just does not work.”

For Retzlaff, an essential component of lessons is what he refers to as the “Retzlaff Regimen,” a series of exercises—targeting onsets, agility and sustaining notes—that take the voice from cold to ready to perform anything from musical theater to art song to opera. The exercises also improve resonance and help singers work through their *passaggi* (transition areas between registers). Retzlaff requires his students to demonstrate and discuss the regimen in lessons. “The point is not what I can get your voice to do,” he says, “the point is can you get your voice to do what I can? Students must know what the exercises are, the exact order in which to practice them, which includes what the pitch boundaries are.”



Blair voice graduates are busy performing in many venues. **Top:** Zach Nadolski, BMus’05, performing as Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast* at Walt Disney World. He has gone on to perform in numerous theatrical productions around the country, as well as singing in *Jubilee!*, a show that has been running for 29 years in Las Vegas, and working as a production singer on the cruise ship *Celebrity Solstice*. **Bottom:** Daniel (BMus’04) and Caitlin Shirley (pre-college alumna) as Fenton and Anne in the 2008 production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* at Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. Daniel is in the final stages of the doctor of music degree, and Caitlin recently finished her master of music degree at IU. This season, he will be a resident young artist with Florida Grand Opera in Miami (singing in performances of *Turandot*, *Les Contes d’Hoffmann*, and *Cyrano*) and Caitlin is joining the chorus of the Lyric Opera of Chicago (singing in performances of *Macbeth*, *Carmen*, and *Lohengrin*).

## The right material

Ensuring that students stick only with material appropriate for their young voices is also a major undertaking of the voice faculty, in choosing material for studio classes, competitions and performances. At the end of spring semester, for example, Jarman goes through a bookcase full of music in her office, closely examining each book and score to see what might

Susannah. Retzlaff and Jarman sang the mature roles of the Count and Countess Almaviva—roles not appropriate for most undergraduate voices.

“Part of our job is to know—particularly with young, big, mature voices—that it’s not appropriate for them to be singing heavy repertoire,” Retzlaff says. “It’s as important for a teacher to say ‘no’ as it is to say ‘yes’ sometimes.”



Blair faculty members Amy Jarman and Jonathan Retzlaff as the Count and Countess Almaviva in Act IV of Vanderbilt Opera Theatre's 2009 production of *The Marriage of Figaro*. Jarman and Retzlaff have had roles in two VOT productions, giving students the opportunity to see them as working professionals as well as mentors.

fit incoming and current students. Shay starts searching for the next Vanderbilt Opera Theatre production immediately after that season's show closes.

“We try to find things that will be useful for [the students], that will address their needs, that will encourage them to stretch and grow,” Shay says. “That’s why we say you’ll never see *La Bohème* on this stage, because it’s way too difficult for our students, but you’ll never see *Rent* either, because that’s not what we teach.”

Last season, the Vanderbilt Opera Theatre mounted a production of *The Marriage of Figaro*, a choice driven by the presence of a baritone (Preston Orr) to sing the title role and a soprano (Katie Heaton) who could handle the role of

After four years at Blair, students emerge knowing how to sing in a healthy fashion, no matter what kind of music they favor.

“We try to create the best musician we possibly can in the overall sense,” Retzlaff says. One way he defines this is someone who can prepare quickly and accurately upon demand. “The musical world is very small ... whether it’s in NYC or academia, word spreads very quickly. Reliable, artistic musicians get hired over and over again. If you’re not prepared, you’re not going to get called again.”

Retzlaff, Shay and Jarman all believe learning how to sing in front of panels, whether in competitions or auditions, is a crucial part of the Blair experience. Thus,

auditioning is built into every aspect of the program. Participation in Vanderbilt Opera Theatre productions, for example, is determined through preliminary and call-back auditions. For performance classes, students are required to come properly attired on their assigned singing days. They are guided in decisions about what clothes and shoes to wear, how to style their hair and makeup, how to stand, and how to announce themselves and their music.

“You think that’s easy to do ... but if you’re not a native German speaker and you’re singing a Schumann song, you have to practice speaking the title of the song,” Jarman says.

Retzlaff even insists that students leave slang—the words “like” and “awesome”—at the door. It’s this kind of attention to detail since his arrival at Blair in 1997 that has helped the school gain an impressive reputation in a relatively short time. His goal has been, he says, to create a curriculum and a sense of readiness in graduates that results in music teachers around the country knowing that Blair is a contender with the top-tier music schools and that the school belongs on their audition lists.

The program’s esteem has begun to spread as its graduates take their place in the music world. Voice department graduates have been accepted into advanced degree programs at Eastman and the New England Conservatory, Indiana and Northwestern universities, the Mannheim Conservatory and Manhattan School of Music among others. They have performed with opera companies, Broadway touring companies and festivals around the country and world. Blair students routinely hold their own at competitions such as the regional National Association for Teachers of Singing and the Graz, Austria-based American Institute for Musical Studies summer program.

“On an undergraduate basis, I would put what we do here up against anybody in the country,” Retzlaff says. “All of us have said if I had had that curriculum, those teachers and that educational experience when I was that age, you’d be interviewing me from backstage at the Met.”

# Fully Costumed and Orchestrated

*Students in Vanderbilt Opera Theatre productions get the full-scale stage experience*

by Michelle Jones

The mischievously dark worlds of filmmaker Tim Burton, illustrator Edward Gorey and the humorously twisted “Fractured Fairy Tales” cartoons are influencing this fall’s Vanderbilt Opera Theatre production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. It’s quite a change from the traditional, straightforward approach taken when the opera was performed a decade ago, and a change in how opera is integrated into the Blair curriculum.

Now the opera course, an elective open to voice majors of any year (as well as any Vanderbilt student), also fulfills an ensemble requirement for Blair students.

“It’s recognition that opera is a significant solo and ensemble experience within our new curriculum,” says Jonathan Retzlaff, chair of the voice department. As a result, some voice students will not participate in symphonic or chamber choir during the second half of the fall semester if they are cast in the opera. Retzlaff believes this new arrangement enhances both the choral and opera experiences for students.

For last season’s production of *The Marriage of Figaro*, for example, students began working with vocal and opera coach Jennifer McGuire—who also serves as VOT’s rehearsal pianist—even before production staging began.

Students are not required to take part in VOT, but it is considered to be an important part of the Blair experience.

“You can’t recruit if you don’t offer stage experience. You can’t have a performance degree in voice and not offer stage experience,” Retzlaff says. He directed the VOT for a year before Gayle Shay came to Blair as director in 1998.

“In Gayle we found a person who loves the entire process—the craft of developing the actors, of helping everybody create the characters and of creating a community within a cast,” Retzlaff says.

Producing a full-scale production with costumes and sets in one semester is not unusual, even in an undergraduate environment. But Blair’s program includes working with a live orchestra—comprised of Blair students under the direction of Robin Fountain—rather than piano accompaniment.

there was a desire to expand the VOT beyond students presenting opera scenes in Turner Recital Hall.

Amy Jarman, senior lecturer in voice, says the VOT offers students a look at how professional companies work, particularly given Shay’s meticulously organized rehearsals. “If we get to 5:15 p.m.



Vanderbilt Opera Theatre performed Gilbert and Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance* at Blair's Ingram Hall in November 2002. Each fall, VOT performs a fully staged production with orchestra featuring composers as varied as Sondheim and Puccini, Mozart and Weill, and the ever popular Gilbert and Sullivan.

“Professor Fountain believes very strongly that instrumental students need to have the experience of playing in an opera pit,” Shay says. “I feel incredibly fortunate for that, because not only is the orchestra very fine, but Robin is also a tremendous collaborator and second set of eyes and ears in the rehearsal process.”

Shay says hers is a “dream” job. She realized a love of directing while in graduate school and was recruited to Blair by Dean Mark Wait in 1998 when, with a new wing of classrooms, studios and a state-of-the-art theater in the works,

and it’s time to move on to the next thing she’s scheduled, Gayle will say “I’m sorry. We’re going to have to stop now,” Jarman explains.

Retzlaff, who along with Jarman has had roles in two VOT productions, feels giving students the opportunity to work alongside their professors allows students to see them as working professionals. “I hope they admire us and see that we are there to support and encourage them, to nurture them,” he says. “We also provide motivation when they need it. We set really high expectations for them.”

# Music That Heals

*Associate Dean Pam Schneller knows first-hand the power of music in community*

*By William Williams*

It would be easy, and true, to say Pam Schneller lives and breathes music.

It would also be an understatement. Schneller—a longtime fixture within the Blair School of Music—views music as more than lyrics, voices and instruments, as more than even the world-unifying “universal language.”

Indeed, Pam Schneller sees music as a spiritual force of sorts, a type of intangible, art-as-life-giving source of healing and hope.

“All music, and vocal music in particular, has the ability to express and bring to life ideas and emotions too deep, too powerful for words,” says Schneller, who serves at Blair in many roles, including associate dean (pre-college and adult program), senior lecturer in choral music and guest conductor for Blair choirs. “I believe music is one of the keys to the salvation of the world.

“Making music in community makes each of us more fully alive, more fully human and more fully connected to each other,” she adds. “I chose to make my career in choral music for that reason, because of the power and joy that comes in enabling others by teaching and evoking the music that lies within each one of us.”

From a practical perspective, Schneller says music offers people a chance to gather, rejoice, reflect and, well, be human.

“Music in community is a key part of most of our significant human rituals—weddings, funerals, commemorations, celebrations,” she explains. “At the horror of Sept. 11, 2001, people all over New York and the world came together in song. They were speechless, but they sang.”

That Schneller sings today can render folks speechless, once they learn her story.

While jogging in Los Angeles in February 2005, Schneller was hit by a motorist. She spent several weeks in intensive care



Associate Dean Pam Schneller, who has taught at Blair since 1999, founded the Vanderbilt Community Chorus a decade ago, directed the Vanderbilt Concert Choir and Chamber Singers from 1999-2008 and led the Blair Children's Chorus program for 14 years.

and underwent surgery for brain hemorrhaging and broken bones. Music helped save her.

“I cannot tell you how, only that music does heal physical and emotional wounds,” she says. “Doctors and nurses—and singing parents—have long known that music soothes, calms, relaxes and promotes healing. In ICU, my blood pressure was alarmingly high. Although I was basically in a coma, my husband [Chancellor's Professor of Piano Roland

Schneller], I am told, sang to me, over and over. Every time he sang, my blood pressure went down. Talking didn't do it. Music did it.”

As Schneller began to recover in the hospital and, later, in a rehabilitation center, people in her choirs inundated her and Roland with “aid, good wishes and encouragement.”

“Over and over we heard ‘because the choir—and the music you help us make—mean so much,’” she says.

“Because it ‘meant so much,’ it gave me strength to keep trying and not give up,” she continues. “Not to be self-deprecating, but I knew it wasn't really me they were responding to. It was ‘music in community.’”

And, no doubt, the Vanderbilt community has Schneller's conductor's baton waved all over it, as the spirited academic founded and/or has overseen six of the 10 existing choirs associated with the Blair School of Music.

The accomplishments are enough to impress husband Roland, one of Blair's original faculty members (his tenure began in 1964) and a venerable figure himself within the Vanderbilt community. Roland says his positive-karma-ed wife always serves as an inspiration.

she founded the Vanderbilt Community Chorus and remains closely attached to that group. She also remains close to the VU Concert Choir and Chamber Singers which she directed from 1999-2008 and the Blair Childrens Chorus program, which she led for 14 years. In addition, she has an extensive background in the church music sector, working as the full-time director of music at local Presbyterian and United Methodist churches from 1988-99.

“Serving as a church musician for over 20 years taught me a profound reverence for the power of poem, prose and music,” she says.

With the church work and full-time choral conducting duties behind her, Schneller now focuses fully on teaching

“I had my first choir solo in grade five in school,” she remembers. “I first conducted a choir in high school. My choral director allowed me to conduct a women's group in a piece I had written for music theory class. I was hooked on making music with others and never looked back.”

Indeed, Schneller has not looked back since that fateful February day in 2005 either. She returned to Blair in July of that year and has come full circle since then, having given a speech for the Blair Senior Recognition event in May 2009. During the speech, Schneller used music education—and the love of music as a healing force—as a metaphor for life and the future the graduates were facing.

“No matter who you are or how perfectly your life in and out of music has

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“Making music in community makes each of us more fully alive, more fully human and more fully connected to each other.”

—Pam Schneller

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“She's such a positive and giving person, I almost feel like whatever she is doing, even if it weren't in music, it would be in the same loving and giving attitude,” Roland Schneller says. “Music is simply her way of communicating.”

Schneller says he and Pam share music in many ways.

“We talk a good bit about it, not about music per se, but our place in the musical life of Blair and the community,” he explains.

A trained vocalist as well as pianist, Schneller says he has always enjoyed singing under the direction of a skilled conductor, in this case, his wife.

“She has a wonderful manner and presentation,” he says. “She works so well on a larger stage. She's proactive. I admire what she is. She is a choral conductor and amateur pianist. I'm more of a one-on-one person. She is exactly what I am not.”

No question Pam Schneller is versatile within the music realm. A decade ago,

undergraduate conducting and on Blair's pre-college and adult students. About 700 strong, the students range from infants to adults in their 80s.

“Getting to know as many of them as I can is a goal and a big challenge,” she says of the students. “I work to help parents and students learn about the many types of classes, lessons and opportunities we offer at Blair.”

In the process, Schneller endeavors to help the pre-college students build and enhance a sense of community.

“I enjoy assisting faculty with the Myra Jackson Blair Honor Scholars,” she says. “These high school students are immersed in music at Blair with lessons, ensembles and classes,” she explains. “Finding others that share a similar passion for music is such joy.”

Schneller's work with youth is not unexpected, as music quickly became a part of her life while she grew up in the suburbs of Chicago.

gone so far, you will find that life brings great surprises, bizarre challenges and incredible and unexpected opportunities,” she said that day.

Looking back, Schneller says penning the speech was enormously difficult. Her emotions ran high. Some physical pain, despite being assuaged by the healing force of song and sound, remained (and still does). Still, Schneller embraced the challenge of crafting and presenting a speech that would directly impact the Vanderbilt students—and subconsciously act as catharsis for Schneller herself.

“I was so humbled to be doing it and there was so much I wanted to say,” she recalls. “Above all, I wanted the graduating seniors to know that their music has given them gifts and skills that will enable them to deal with whatever life brings them.”

Life has brought Pam Schneller many challenges. Music has helped her face them head on.

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Featured events in late September and early October include:

## **Guitar Weekend**

**September 30–October 2**

**Times vary; check the website**

### **Ingram Hall**

John Johns brings friends together for his fall concert, and special guest artist Michael Cedric Smith performs and conducts a master class.

*All guitar weekend events sponsored by Steve and Judy Turner.*

## **A Very Special Conversation with Jim Fogelsong**

**October 3, 4 p.m.**

### **Ingram Hall**

Songwriter, journalist and Blair faculty member Peter Cooper interviews Music Row legend Jim Fogelsong in an informal session open to the public and recorded for later broadcast on television and Web.

## **Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet**

**October 4, 8 p.m.**

### **Ingram Hall**

Arguably the best ensemble of its kind in the world, the quintet will perform in a rare visit to Nashville—and their first appearance at Blair.

*Accommodations for the Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet are graciously provided by the Hutton Hotel.*

## **Yarn/Wire Chamber Ensemble**

**October 5, 8 p.m.**

### **Turner Recital Hall**

The chamber quartet devoted to the performance of 21st century music presents a guest artist recital.

## **Schumann Celebration**

**October 10 and 11**

**Times vary; check the website**

### **Ingram Hall**

The Blair voice and chamber music faculty members present two special evenings of music and song celebrating composer Robert Schumann in celebration of the 200th year of his birth.

*Sponsored by an anonymous friend of the Blair School.*

**Plus**—A special Halloween performance by Blair Percussion VORTEX on October 31; Blair Woodwind Quintet on November 1; Vanderbilt Opera Theatre and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* on November 12 and 14; and a host of Nightcaps throughout the fall for your enjoyment!

Visit the new website at <http://blair.vanderbilt.edu> for more information about concerts and events at Blair for both fall 2010 and spring 2011.

# Commissions Update



Hersch

## Hersch to compose for BSQ

Michael Hersch has been commissioned to write a chamber music piece for the Blair String Quartet to be delivered spring 2011 for "The Blair Commissions: Music for the 21st Century" through funding from the James Stephen Turner Family Foundation.

Hersch first came to international attention when he was 25 and won first prize in the American Composers Awards. The award resulted in a performance of his *Elegy*, conducted by Marin Alsop in New York's Alice Tully Hall in early 1997. Later that year he became one of the youngest recipients ever of a Guggenheim Fellowship in composition. Hersch has also been the recipient of the Rome Prize (2000), the Berlin Prize (2001) and both the Charles Ives Scholarship (1996) and Goddard Lieberon Fellowship (2006) from the American Academy of Arts & Letters.

Regarded among today's foremost pianists, he has appeared on the Van Cliburn Foundation's "Modern at the Modern" Series, the Romaeuropa Festival, the Festival of Contemporary Music "Nuova Consonanza," American Acad-

emy in Berlin Series, Festa Europea della Musica, St. Louis' Sheldon Concert Hall, and in New York City at Merkin Concert Hall, the 92nd St. Y Tisch Center for the Arts and Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall, among others.

Hersch was a fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center, the Norfolk Festival for Contemporary Music and the Pacific Music Festival in Sapporo, Japan. He studied at the Peabody Institute of Music in Baltimore and the Moscow Conservatory in Russia. He currently serves on the composition faculty of the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University.

## WW5 to release Schickele work on Naxos label

The Blair Woodwind Quintet has recorded *A Year in the Catskills*, the piece composed for them by Peter Schickele as one of the Blair Commissions. It will be released in late 2011 on the Naxos label.

Produced by quintet member Jared Hauser, assistant professor of oboe, and Frank Kirchner, adjunct

associate professor of saxophone, the recording was made in the Martha Rivers Ingram Center for the Performing Arts with recording engineers Gary Hedden and Joseph Logsdon of GH Audio. *A Year in the Catskills* is one of five pieces on the recording, which also includes *Gardens* for oboe and piano; *What Did You Do Today at Jeffery's House?*, three pieces for French horn and piano; *Dream Dances* for flute, oboe and cello; and *Diversions* for oboe, clarinet and bassoon.

In addition to Hauser, the other members of the Blair Woodwind Quintet are Cynthia Estill, associate professor of bassoon; Jane Kirchner, associate professor of flute; Cassandra Lee, associate professor of clarinet; and Leslie Norton, assistant professor of horn. They were joined on the recording by Melissa Rose, associate professor of piano, and Felix Wang, associate professor of cello. James Lovensheimer, assistant professor of musicology, is writing program notes for the recording.



The Blair Woodwind Quintet, from left, Leslie Norton, horn; Cynthia Estill, bassoon; Cassandra Lee, clarinet; Jared Hauser, oboe; and Jane Kirchner, flute.

# Blair sends two ensembles to Fischhoff competition

Two Blair School of Music chamber music groups, one collegiate and one pre-collegiate, were selected in May for the live rounds of the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition, the nation's largest chamber music competition. From a total of 130 entries, only 48 were selected for the live competitive rounds.

The pre-college Parthenon String Quartet, comprised of Annie Bender, violin; Jacob Schafer, violin; Will Bender, viola; and Alvin Kim, cello, made it through to the semifinal round of competition. Coached by Kirsten Cassel-Greer with assistance by the Blair String Quartet, their teachers are Carolyn Huebl, Chris Teal, Kathryn Plummer and Kirsten Cassel-Greer.

"The Fischhoff competition was one of the greatest musical experiences of my life," Annie Bender said. "I learned a lot about the competition atmosphere and talked to some incredible judges."

"Attending the Fischhoff and listening to some of the groups that performed really showed me what chamber music can be like on the national stage," Schafer added.

The Troika Trio was selected in the collegiate division. Its members are: Valerie Hsu, piano; Lindsey Reymore, oboe;



The Parthenon Quartet (from left) is Alvin Kim, Will Bender, Jacob Schafer and Annie Bender.

and Thomas Crespo, bassoon. Coached by Melissa Rose and Jared Hauser, their teachers are Craig Nies, Jared Hauser and Cynthia Estill.

The Fischhoff competition has grown each year since its inception in 1973, with an average of 125 ensembles representing 22 nationalities now entering in either the wind or string categories.

Fischhoff is the only national chamber music competition with both senior divisions (ages 18-35) and a junior division (age 18 and younger). Since its founding, more than 5,000 musicians have participated, many of whom have gone on to distinguished careers in music performance and education.

"It was an extraordinarily well-run and organized competition," said Melissa



The Troika Trio (from left) consists of Valerie Hsu, Lindsey Reymore and Thomas Crespo.

Rose, assistant dean and chamber music coach. "I appreciated that they included an educational component as well as the competitive aspect. This was especially important at the junior level, because it helped them understand how to improve their performances, and it inspired them for a future career in professional chamber music."

## Astons join KeyBoard

Lisa and Lang Aston are the two newest members of the Blair KeyBoard. Lisa Aston grew up in Indianapolis and graduated from Duke University. She is a former investment banker in public finance. Lisa currently serves as a member of the Harpeth Hall board of trustees and is an active volunteer for Alive Hospice.

Lang Aston grew up in Dallas, graduated from Duke University and received his MBA from the University of Texas at Austin. He is the chief financial officer for e+CancerCare in Nashville, a private operator of outpatient cancer care centers. His three older siblings attended Vanderbilt University, including Susan Barge, BA'81, who

is associate provost for strategic initiatives at Vanderbilt.

The Astons moved to Nashville in 2002 from New York City. Their two daughters, Caroline and Hallie, are enrolled in the Blair pre-college program. Caroline studies violin with Carol Smith, and Hallie studies piano with Jama Reagan.

# In the VORTEX

A vortex is so powerful that it draws everything into it, making the name of Blair's newest percussion ensemble extremely accurate.

"The name 'VORTEX' brings to mind a pulling together of disparate things to create a hybrid," says Michael Holland, artistic director of VORTEX. "A student will be challenged to perform as more than a musician giving expression to music on a page. This is a direct reflection of my experience in CRASH, Cirque du Soleil and numerous theatrical projects over the years, and it is also a reflection of what is happening in performance companies like De la Guarda, Fuerza Bruta, Blue Man Group—all of these companies ask their performers to reach beyond the conventional approach to percussion performance as it has been defined for many years."

The music in a VORTEX performance is carefully selected to create a dramatic arc. Central to this is how one piece moves into and influences another, the ebb and flow of energy in the theater and the ultimate effect on the audience.

"Probably the first thing apparent at a VORTEX performance is the look," Holland says. "I want to catch the audience off

guard visually as well as aurally. The next element is the question of how one piece unfolds into another. This is a combination of three things—the actual logistical instrument requirements for each piece, the musical language and color of each piece, and the visual and physical aspects of each piece.

"Percussion performance is a very visual art form," Holland continues. "When the music integrates nuanced movement into the production of sound, the net result approaches theater. And this is



VORTEX's spring concert featured a 1906 French silent film classic for which the ensemble provided accompaniment, and *Sensemaya*, music for the ritual killing of a snake, on which the group collaborated with DJ Brad 'Kali' Bowden, Daniel Bernard Roumain, BMus'93, Tracy Silverman and the Hart String Quartet.

where percussionists in VORTEX have to begin to think like actors and even dancers. The quality of movement becomes just as important as the quality of tone production."

Holland actively courts composers, filmmakers, musicians of all stripes, choreographers and engineers to create relation-

ships and new opportunities. This year's concerts showcased works and collaborations with composers Jeffery Briggs, Mary Ellen Childs, the Eric Stokes estate, Daniel Bernard Roumain, BMus'93, Tracy Silverman, and, on the cutting edge of new music performance, DJ and remix artist Brad 'Kali' Bowden, one of the most sought-after DJs in the world. "And I would be remiss without acknowledging the first-rate technical work of [Technical Director] Joe DeBusk and his crew. These guys are the very best in Nashville, and VORTEX could not exist without them," Holland says.

The next performance, on Halloween, will include a dramatic tour de force with actor Jim Lovensheimer, assistant professor of musicology, in a chilling theatrical adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-tale Heart," backed up by a percussion score composed by Michael Slayton, associate professor of music theory. On April 3, 2011, VORTEX will partner with Massachusetts Institute of Technology-trained engineer John Harrison to integrate percussion performance and computer technology with a stunning visual result.

"One huge reason I've had such great success with VORTEX is because Bill Wiggins

[associate professor of percussion] has built such a solid percussion program at Blair," says Holland, who joined the faculty in 2008. "For someone like me coming in with my performance background, it has made it very easy for this less conventional approach to percussion to take root."

# tutti

## FACULTY

**The Blakemore Trio** (Carolyn Huebl, violin; Felix Wang, cello, and Amy Dorfman, piano) gave their New York debut at Merkin Hall in March. They also appeared on two concerts in North Carolina at Chamber Music Wilmington and The American Music Festival, and on series in Knoxville, Sewanee and Pickwick, Tenn. The trio also received a Faculty Development Award from Vanderbilt.

**Gregory Barz**, associate professor of musicology (ethnomusicology), gave the annual James Moore endowed lecture at Millikin University in the spring, focusing on his research on music and HIV/AIDS in Africa. He gave presentations at the 2010 TEDx Nashville event as well as at Indiana University. He continued his latest research during the summer in Rwanda, conducting fieldwork on the role of music in the genocide of the country. In addition, he served as a Franklin Fellow in Global Citizenship in Lugano, Switzerland, for the second year in a row.

**Joy Calico**, associate professor of musicology, published a chapter on Joachim Herz's film version of *Der fliegende Holländer* in the collection *Wagner and Cinema* (Indiana University Press) and a chapter about Schoenberg as teacher in *The Cambridge Companion to Schoenberg*. She gave invited colloquia for the Opera Studies Forum at the University of Iowa and the music departments of Columbia University and Tufts University. She also delivered a paper at the International Eisler Conference at the University of London and conducted four



The Blakemore Trio gave the world premiere of Susan Botti's *Gates of Silence* in February at Blair and in March at New York City's Merkin Hall. Composer Botti (pictured right) sang the soprano solo for both concerts.

weeks of archival research in Berlin for her current Schoenberg reception project.

**Kirsten Cassel-Greer**, adjunct artist teacher of cello, taught at the Tennessee Cello Workshop, a national event in Knoxville last February.

**Karen Clarke**, adjunct professor of violin, gave a master class and recital at Stephen F. Austin State University in Texas in March. She was also a soloist with Atlanta Baroque Orchestra in the Bach *Double Violin Concerto* with guest baroque violinist Dana Maiben. She continues to perform regularly with the Santa Fe Pro Musica Chamber Orchestra and the Atlanta Baroque Orchestra.

**Dale Cockrell**, professor of musicology, in March gave the keynote address on his notion of a "public musicology" and

presented a paper on "Music, Memory and Autobiography" at the Society for American Music conference in Ottawa, Canada. At that conference he was honored with the Society's Distinguished Service Award. In early April, he opened the conference of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music in New Orleans by presenting some of his recent research on American music and prostitution. He journeyed to Slovenia in mid-April as a guest of the U.S. Embassy to give concerts and talks on "Pa's Fiddle Project." In Pittsburgh he spoke about the audiences for blackface minstrelsy at a symposium on Stephen Foster. In July he assumed a joint position with the Center for Popular Music at Middle Tennessee State University as its interim director. In July, he also went to Minnesota for a conference (and a paper) and to Pittsburgh, where he



was an instructor in an NEH Summer Institute on "Dvorak in America." In August, *Pa's Fiddle: Charles Ingalls, American Fiddler*, a CD he co-produced with **Matt Combs**, adjunct instructor of fiddling, and Joe Weed, was released. *The Ingalls Wilder Family Songbook* also was published in August by the Music of the United States of America project.

**Cynthia Cyrus**, associate professor of musicology and associate dean, will become Vanderbilt University's associate provost for undergraduate affairs in January. She is also a co-editor and contributing author of the book *Music Education in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Indiana University Press).

**Amy Dorfman**, associate professor of piano, returned this summer for her sixth season as guest artist and teacher to the 2010 Tennessee Governor's School for the Arts.

**Elizabeth Eckert**, adjunct artist teacher of piano, was featured on "Live from Studio C" on Nashville's WPLN in February. Her EP *Bloomington* was featured in the *Indiana Daily Student* and *Bloomington Herald-Times* and can be found on CDbaby or iTunes.

**Jared Hauser**, assistant professor of oboe, performed solo recitals at the National Theater of Costa Rica, National Museum of Costa Rica and at Lipscomb University. He performed with Music City Baroque and the Nashville Symphony last spring and gave master classes at the Cincinnati College-Conservatory and Louisiana State University. This summer, he taught at and was a soloist with the Hot Springs Music Festival Orchestra and at Interlochen Center for the Arts. He performed at the International Double Reed Society conference recital.

**Laura Hauser**, adjunct artist teacher of bassoon, completed the doctor of musical arts degree from Louisiana State University in December and performed on the Gateway Chamber Ensemble's CD *Wind Serenades* released on Summit Records.

**Michael Holland**, adjunct assistant professor of percussion, performed at Indiana University in conjunction with the biannual conference of the Magic



Andrew Jennings, professor of violin and chamber music at the University of Michigan and founding member of the Concord String Quartet, gave a violin master class in Turner Hall this spring. Here, he works with Michelle Godbee, student of Carolyn Huebl.

Lantern Society of the United States and Canada in May. Playing percussion with acclaimed silent film accompanists Phil Carli and Don Livingston, and supporting a group of vocal soloists, he performed vintage percussion and sound effects for 30 popular songs from the early 20th century. All of the songs featured rare illustrated song slides that were commonly used in early movie houses and vaudeville from about 1895 to 1917.

**John Johns**, associate professor of guitar, last March performed solo recitals in New York City at the Caedmon School of Music; in Springfield, Ill., for the Springfield Guitar Society's spring concert series; and two solo recitals for guitar classes at Independence High School in Thompson's Station, Tenn. Johns participated in an interview and question-and-answer session conducted by **Charlie Anderson**, BMus'02, faculty member at Independence High.

**Karen Ann Krieger**, associate professor of piano and piano pedagogy, presented a pedagogy workshop to the Bowling Green Kentucky Independent Music Teacher's Association at Royal Music in April.

**Melanie Lowe**, associate professor of musicology, served as guest editor for a special Haydn issue of the *Journal of Musicology*, to which she contributed the

introductory article "The Art of Transition: After Haydn Year 2009." Her latest meditation on teaching, titled "Teaching Music History Today: Making Tangible Connections to the Hear and Now," appeared in the inaugural issue of the new *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, and her review of Sean Gallagher and Thomas Forrest Kelly's edited volume *The Century of Bach and Mozart* appeared in *Notes*. She also presented her paper "Difference and Enlightenment in Haydn's *Oxford Symphony*" at a musicology conference at Smith College, her undergraduate alma mater.

**James Maiello**, senior lecturer in music history and literature, published an article titled "On the Manufacture and Dating of the Pistoia Choirbooks" in the April issue of *Journal of the Plain Song and Medieval Music*.

**Joshua McGuire**, senior lecturer in aural skills, gave the American premiere of Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph's *Five African Sketches* for solo guitar at the Heidelberg New Music Festival in Tiffin, Ohio, in March.

**Valerie Middleton**, adjunct artist teacher of piano, performed miscellaneous pieces by Samuel Barber for the Nashville Piano Study Club in May.

**Joe Rea Phillips**, senior artist teacher of guitar and assistant dean, gave a self-defense presentation on campus in March at the Highland Quad with members of the Vanderbilt University Kung Fu Club for which Phillips has served as faculty advisor and instructor for 20 years. The presentation and demonstration was sponsored by the Vanderbilt Office of Housing and Residential Education.

**Crystal Plohman**, senior artist teacher of fiddle, and her husband, William Wiegman, are delighted to announce the birth of their daughter Kelsie Julianna Wiegman, born November 25 and weighing 7 pounds.

**Jonathan Retzlaff**, associate professor of voice, and pianist **Jennifer McGuire**, lecturer in opera and vocal coaching, presented a guest artist recital at Towson University in Baltimore in March. Their program of Purcell, Ravel, Griffes and American song was followed by a day of master classes and coaching with Towson graduate and undergraduate students. Retzlaff and McGuire will return this summer to teach and coach on the faculty of the American Institute of Musical Studies Festival in Graz, Austria.

**Melissa Rose**, associate professor of piano and assistant dean, will assume the title of associate dean in January. She will be responsible for academic matters in the collegiate program.

**Michael Alec Rose**, associate professor of composition, gave a retrospective concert last November of his first two *Viola Sonatas* with **John Kochanowski**, associate professor of viola. In May Peter Sheppard Skaerved performed *Palimpsest* for solo violin at the British Museum, London, as the inaugural concert of the British Museum Project, and in August *Wege durch das Land* was performed by Skaerved at the Literature and Music Festival in Westphalia, Germany. Rose's book, *Audible Signs: Essays from a Musical Ground*, was released recently by Continuum Books, and in September, Rose will be the featured author at the Carmel Authors & Ideas Festival in California in support of the book. He will be the featured lecturer in October for One Day University in New York City on "The Beatles, Shakespeare, and Beethoven: Hearing the Connections." New works in progress include *Piano*

*Quartet* (2010), based on three paintings by Hans Hofmann, and *Fourth Viola Sonata* (2010) for three violists (**Kathryn Plummer**, professor of viola, John Kochanowski and Maria Lambros).

**Marian Shaffer**, adjunct professor of harp, attended the American Harp Society national conference in Seattle in July. She was also a guest artist instructor at the Sewanee Summer Music Festival in July.

**Carol Smith**, senior artist teacher of violin, was a clinician and teacher trainer at Ithaca College Suzuki Institute in Ithaca, N.Y., for two weeks in July.

**David Binns Williams**, lecturer in musicianship and aural studies, director of the Vanderbilt Community Chorus and Vanderbilt University Concert Choir, served as clinician for the Iola, Wis., High School Choir while on tour to Nashville in March. He was also a clinician with the St. Charles High School Choir of St. Charles, Minn., in early August.

## STAFF

**Carol Dunne**, collegiate registrar, and her husband John, traveled to Ethiopia in

January to bring their son, Binyam Fisher Dunne, home to Tennessee.

**Adam Michael**, assistant director of development, and his wife, Susan, announce the birth of their daughter, Avery Frances, on July 13, weighing 8 pounds, 2 ounces.

## IN MEMORY

**James Griggs**, BMus'94, of Nashville, July 23, 2010. He was a 1989 graduate of Franklin Road Academy and a magna cum laude graduate of Vanderbilt majoring in music with a minor in computer science. He had been employed by Aspect Software of Brentwood as a principal software engineer since 1998.

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