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## 'Beat the Rush'

Butler School of Music's new concert series connects great music with great art

BY NATALIE ZELDIN, MARCH 15, 2013, ARTS

Lately it seems that the only reason that classical music makes the headlines is because of another orchestra that's gone bankrupt. While orchestral musicians in the past could expect a regular paycheck and a regular audience of subscription ticket-holders, that simply isn't the reality anymore – not exactly encouraging news for a flutist on the cusp of completing a graduate performing degree. But I actually find this a very exciting time to be a musician, and here's why: As the world is changing, classical music is changing, too, redefining its role in our time. Its musicians are becoming much more vigorous and aggressive in rallying enthusiasm for their chosen art form, to the point of taking their music where their audience is instead of always waiting for the audience to come to them. So stop the presses! Classical's leaving the concert hall to find the community.

The Butler School of Music is at the forefront of preparing students for these new challenges of audience-building through community engagement. It creates opportunities for students enrolled in chamber music to participate in a range of unconventional performances that bring classical music to new audiences. Evan Leslie, the community outreach coordinator for the school, crafts a wide variety of these: from late-night music gigs at Caffe Medici to art pep rallies for children at the Texas NeuroRehab Center to concerts for retirees at Longhorn Village.

One of the most exciting is a concert series called "Beat the Rush" at the Blanton Museum of Art. Originally conceived for University of Texas professional staff, these concerts provide a peaceful alternative to the blood-boiling standstill of an I-35 commute home. "At the end of a long day, after work, the staff can have a moment of retreat," Leslie explains. "The museum is a perfect place to refresh, through affirmation of great music and art." In these 40-minute programs, the group moves from gallery to gallery with different musical performances along the way. The music is chosen to resonate with works in the given spaces, so there are what Leslie describes as "multiple access points" for people to respond to both the visual art and performances.

While engagement is the primary goal, Leslie does not underestimate his audience. "I don't choose music based on its accessibility – that's not the idea. We are presenting the music that the musicians are most passionate about, without any compromises." I can vouch for that, as last month, I performed at "Beat the Rush," playing an unaccompanied flute piece written in 2005 by Houston-composer Aaron Alon. "Hibakusha" is about post-traumatic stress in victims of the atomic bombs in Japan. I performed it in front of Ben Shahn's 1960 painting *From That Day On*, which highlights the same bleak subject. It may go without saying that the tonal

landscape of the piece is disturbing, even disconcerting. In spite of this, it was easily the most moving performance of this powerful piece that I have played. Several people came to me afterward to talk about how much the piece had touched them – one was in tears. Without the conventions of the concert format, audiences let their guards down and are often more open to works that might be otherwise challenging and unfamiliar.

The next concert takes place as part of Blanton's Third Thursday program. As if free admission to the museum, cheap gourmet pizza and wine, lectures, and free yoga weren't enough, this month's "Beat the Rush" promises to be an exciting program, with Shostakovich's *Third String Quartet* and a performance by an award-winning student trombone quartet.

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*The next "Beat the Rush" concert will take place Thursday, March 21, 5:30pm, at the Blanton Museum of Art, MLK & Congress, UT campus. For more information, call 471-7324 or visit [www.blantonmuseum.org](http://www.blantonmuseum.org).*

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