

Outside the Music Box . . .

Chamber music students cultivate new audiences through community outreach



Every member of our Butler School faculty and staff looks forward to the day when graduates review the terms of their first contracts as professional musicians. We also aspire for our graduates to become artist leaders, generously sharing their talents with neglected communities and advocating for a broader appreciation of music. These parallel goals of employment and good citizenship are beginning to intersect. Struggling with dwindling audiences and finances, prominent professional orchestras, opera companies, and concert presenters have been forced to explore fresh, aggressive ways of building community interest and support. In the past, a newly hired musician could expect to simply commute to a traditional concert hall for a day's work of rehearsals and formal evening concerts. The job description detailed on our students' first contracts will expect more, requiring regular and extensive non-traditional performances in the community. The Butler School of Music is proud to be at the forefront of preparing music students to tackle the challenges of the changing modern reality. We offer an innovative curriculum that provides enriching, real-world performance opportunities and specialized training in audience engagement, encouraging

our students to actively cultivate new audiences, challenging them to share their music with anyone in any setting.

Teaching creative strategies for community engagement is a major element of the undergraduate and graduate chamber music curriculum and the Butler School's overall educational mission. Each semester, students enrolled in chamber music are required to participate in one of seven different community outreach projects conceived and directed by the Butler School's community outreach coordinator, Evan Leslie. Projects are designed to challenge our students, placing them in a variety of unconventional performance environments, where they must interact with a diverse array of community audiences of all ages. In workshops, coaching sessions and outreach master classes, our illustrious chamber music faculty share specific strategies for relating to each distinct type of audience. In the spring 2012 semester 125 chamber music students ventured out of the safety and comfort of our building to bring music to audiences of all ages and backgrounds. Here are a few chamber music outreach project highlights:

Arts Pep-Rallies at Texas NeuroRehab Center

During the spring 2012 semester, chamber music students from the Butler School were involved in an innovative residency at the UT Charter School at the Texas NeuroRehab Center (TNRC). TNRC is home to about 60 children affected by complex medical, behavioral, and learning difficulties such as autism or brain injury. Over the course of three months, four chamber music ensembles made ten visits, performing music during the Charter School's weekly "arts pep-rallies." In addition to the pep-rallies, The Aiana String Quartet, UT's young professional quartet-in-residence, worked extensively with middle and high school students in the classroom, using live performance of Bartok's third string quartet to inspire creative writing and art projects.

A variety of different Butler School ensembles presented pep-rally concerts for the entire K-12 student body in the school's gymnasium. TNRC pep-rallies are like any other school's pep-rallies, with students wearing school colors (burnt orange, like UT!) and waving pom-poms, running through a reception line of teachers and therapists, offering high-fives and pats on the back. TNRC pep-rallies focus on academic



The Skyros Quartet—Sarah Pizzichemi, Marina Branković, Justin Kurys, Willie Braun (not pictured)—performs during the Music Expedition Scavenger Hunt Concert at Texas Memorial Museum.

and artistic accomplishments, rather than sports. Children take turns sharing good news from the week, reciting original poems and stories and singing songs. Butler School students served as emcees and as the in-house band. TRNC children heard performances from a UT flute and guitar duo, a brass quintet, and two string quartets. Each performance was designed to be interactive, with commentary, listening games, movement, and discussion. During frequent visits, the TNRC children overcame struggles with communication and interpersonal skills, and enthusiastically welcomed their new musician friends, actively participating in concerts and lingering afterwards, eager to meet our Butler Students one-on-one.

“The project has been a tremendously successful learning experience for everyone involved,” said Dorothy Goodman, principal of the TNRC UT Charter School. “These children rarely enjoy experiences that others take for granted—exposure to music, art, and mentorship from compassionate adults from the community. When the UT musicians visit, our students come to life with excitement. They’re more creative. They’re more open, engaged and motivated. It’s been wonderful.”

“It’s been extremely gratifying to see the TNRC students enjoying the performances, but I’m especially thrilled with the growth I’ve observed in the UT performers,” said Evan Leslie. “The children at TNRC are so



The Aiana String Quartet - Jillian Annie Bloom, Mario Anton Andreu, Roseminna Watson, Hanna Hurwitz - pose with UT Charter School teacher Jamie Reichardt after a class visit about music and mask making.

What Starts Here Changes the World

By Jacqueline Perrin, Senior, Piano Performance Major

Kelsey tapped me on the shoulder. “What are we supposed to be doing right now?” she whispered, unsure. We were seated side-by-side, attending a classical chamber music concert in the vast Bates Recital Hall, watching as the stage manager rearranged stands in utter silence. I considered her question for a moment, and it occurred to me how odd this experience must be for a “layerperson.” I’ve made it a point to bring non-musician friends to classical music performances, and my guests unfailingly express uncertainty or worry regarding conventions classical musicians find so commonplace.

These experiences have allowed me to look at classical concerts not as they have been, but as they could be. I am the founder and president of a student organization called *Classical Reinvention*, which aims to share classical music with a broader audience by changing aspects of the presentation style and concert environment, while also preserving the integrity of the art form. With professional orchestras struggling and audiences writing off classical music as an irrelevant, dead art form, musicians need to be bold and creative. If we do not begin to advocate for our art form, who will?

In Spring 2012, *Classical Reinvention* began staging monthly productions to experiment with new strategies for sharing music with wider and more diverse audiences. Our performances include visual stimuli, audience inclusion, clear communication of our expectations of the audience, and a theme to tie it all together.

Our second concert, entitled *Music Under the Stars*, experimented with an unconventional venue’s effect on audience engagement. We presented four fifteen-minute acts, utilizing varied instrumentation and time periods. The final act featured UT student composer Joel Love’s exquisite work, *Synchronicity in Purple Minor*, a reflection on artwork he encountered at UT’s Blanton Museum of Art. We originally planned to offer this performance on the roof of the

astronomy building, with public access to the impressive \$20,000 telescope. As luck would have it, it started pouring rain an hour before the performance, so my team and I did some fancy footwork to convert a classroom I had reserved into a makeshift black-box theater. Even with the quick change of plans, the intimacy of the room allowed for discussion and collaboration with the audience.

During each piece, audience members used paper, writing utensils, chalk, and mosaic pieces to illustrate their reactions to the music. Following each performance, I facilitated a discussion in which audience members shared responses and artistic renderings inspired by the music. People read poems aloud, explained abstract drawings depicting the music, and representations of the performers themselves. We discussed the history of music and the performers’ experiences learning the music. The entire concert was a very intimate and highly participatory experience, which was moving and gratifying for everyone involved.

I have received invaluable support and inspiration from the Butler School of Music. The Butler School represents a coalition of devoted, intelligent, talented, and unusually kind human beings. Faculty and staff members such as Robert Freeman, Evan Leslie, Chuck Dillard, Glenn Richter, and Kathy Panoff have graciously given me their guidance and advice, which has proven to be extraordinarily helpful.

My experience with *Classical Reinvention* has completely changed my perception of and interaction with classical music. I want to ignite a passion for classical music in all generations. There is so much that this music has to offer, and it is so underrepresented in our culture today. My future plans include major collaborations with visual artists, dancers, and actors. Perhaps being young and foolish infuses me with unrealistic aspirations. Perhaps. But I heard once that “what starts here changes the world,” and I’m inclined to believe it.

imaginative and curious, and their reactions to music—their questions and comments—have clearly impacted the musicians. I think the UT students will remember this experience for the rest of their careers.”

“My experience with the UT musicians was amazing. It moved me in many positive ways. The music opened the calmer side of me and unlocked my creative qualities,” said a TNRC student.

The Butler School and UT Charter Schools will continue the project next year, and they will expand the program, offering a similar residency for foster children attending the UT Charter School at Helping Hand.

Forty Acres Concerts at Longhorn Village

For the past several years, the Butler School has presented the monthly Forty Acres Concert Series at Longhorn Village (LHV) retirement and assisted living community. LHV is home to hundreds of senior citizens, many with mobility limitations that keep them from attending evening concerts away from home. With that in mind, Butler School’s Forty Acres Concert Series brings enriching performances to them. Most importantly—these folks are family! The majority of residents at LHV are UT alumni and they share our pride in hearing the accomplishments of our current students.

The 2011–12 school year was full of memorable chamber music performances. In December, Professor Delaine Fedson led the UT Harp Ensemble in a delightful concert of holiday favorites, culminating in a clever, original arrangement of *The Eyes of Texas* spliced together with Handel’s Hallelujah chorus, which brought the audience to their feet with laughter and “hook ‘em horns” gestures. In February, the Aiana String Quartet not only performed a beautiful concert, but they also invited the audience to join them in a “very open rehearsal.” In this unique concert format, residents were empowered to stop the quartet at any moment to ask a question or pose a suggestion. The Aiana even polled the audience when they found themselves debating an interpretive decision about the music. Other chamber music ensembles guided the residents through a world tour of music, from Argentine tangos to Scandinavian brass quintets. The series culminated in April with JAM!, a jazz appreciation month performance by the Longhorn Jazz Band. The band, made up of undergraduates representing many different majors throughout the university, played favorite mid-century jazz standards for a packed house of over 200, including special guest Vincent R. DiNino, emeritus director of the Longhorn Band. Residents danced in the aisles and raucously sang *The Eyes of Texas* to close the show.

The Forty Acres Series has blossomed into something much more significant than monthly concerts. With frequent visits, the Butler School has nurtured a cherished relationship with this community of alumni



Longhorn Village residents sing “The Eyes of Texas” at a Forty Acres Concert.

and retirees. Students and residents mingle after concerts, enjoying multigenerational fellowship and passion for music.

“At Longhorn Village, up in the hills of Austin, UT’s ongoing gift of music has been our delight!” wrote Marian Heilbrun, a Longhorn Village resident. “I’m constantly amazed that gifted young musicians, chosen from all over the world, come to us, sharing their knowledge and experience in engaging and refreshing post-concert conversations. They give us ‘The Keys to the Kingdom of Music’ for which we are deeply grateful.”



The Skyros Quartet charms children at Texas Memorial Museum.

Music Expedition: A Children’s Scavenger Hunt Concert at Texas Memorial Museum

On March 3, as part of the campus-wide open house Explore UT, five Butler School chamber music groups presented child-friendly, interactive mini-concerts among the exhibits in the Texas Memorial Museum. Small audiences encountered each concert by following a scavenger hunt map through the four-story museum. Each mini-concert was designed to relate music to the scientific displays in the various galleries. To honor central Texas’ prehistoric history as a social gathering place of dinosaurs, a string quartet held a dino-dance party in front of the fossil remains of a triceratops. A violin and viola duo used the famous variations in Handel-Halverson’s *Passacaglia* to help their young audience imagine the diverse flight styles of birds in the avian gallery. Children and parents crammed in between the glowing glass cases of colorful, stuffed birds, mesmerized by the virtuosity of the two Butler School undergraduates. In the museum’s paleontology lab, a flautist led an “aural excavation” through layers of modern music to find an ancient musical quote by Debussy. Right next door, children used toothbrushes to excavate a real fossil, with the help of a museum docent. In the nocturnal animals gallery, a trio of violin, flute, and harp asked their audience to close their eyes and listen intensely to changes in their music, just like a nocturnal animal would. After completing all of the musical and scientific activities, children received a prize.

About 400 children and parents participated in the Music Expedition scavenger hunt concert. Families and school groups came to the campus from all over Texas to participate in Explore UT. After the success of this initial collaboration, the Butler School and the Texas Memorial Museum plan to produce a similar scavenger hunt concert next year, along with other, new family-friendly programs.

Cultural Campus Concert Crawl

Aiming to immerse the campus in music, on April 14, twenty Butler School chamber music students simultaneously presented concerts at four of UT’s acclaimed museums—the Blanton Museum of Art, the Harry Ransom Center, the Texas Memorial Museum, and the Visual Arts

Center in the department of Art and Art History. In the weeks prior to the concert crawl, students worked diligently with faculty and the community outreach coordinator to compose presentations that would be accessible and informative to an audience new to classical music. In designing their programs, the students endeavored to choose music that would relate to the art and exhibits in the various performance spaces.

On the afternoon of the crawl, guests encountered a wide variety of music and ensembles stationed throughout the campus. A quartet of tubas bellowed ancient chorales under a canopy of dinosaur bones at the Texas Memorial Museum. A flautist “beat-boxed” and purred new music to delighted crowds in a contemporary art gallery at the Visual Arts Center. Two blocks down the street a string duo engulfed the Blanton’s beautiful blue atrium in Ravel’s exotic harmonies. At all of the concerts, Butler School students engaged their audiences in a casual conversation about the music they were performing, sharing photos of the composers, and welcoming questions throughout their presentations.

Concerts repeated throughout the afternoon, so that museum goers could travel at their leisure from venue to venue, learning about music, art, science, and history. Over three hundred people participated in the concert crawl, including a bike tour group, a public school teacher training group, and retirement home groups. All of the concerts were presented as part of regular museum admission, with no additional cost.

“Our audiences were very engaged and interested in our program,” said Conner O’Meara, a graduate clarinet student. “My experience performing at the Ransom Center was VERY rewarding and artistically satisfying!”

When our students graduate and embark on their careers, they will feel special confidence and insight, reflecting on memories of uncommon instruction and performing opportunities provided at the Butler School of Music. At the Butler School, we’re preparing our students to tackle the new challenges of the 21st century. We’re proud to be at the forefront of community outreach training. By placing our students in unconventional performing situations, where they interact with a wide variety of community audiences, we’re enabling them to envision a fuller role for themselves in society. We’re encouraging them to be creative, compassionate, and versatile artists that enrich and inspire every audience they encounter.



Conner O’Meara, clarinet; Aaron Wright, bassoon; and Bradley Emerson, piano; perform at the Harry Ransom Center during the April 14 Cultural Campus Concert Crawl.

Disco Classical

By Mackenzie Slottow, MM Spring 2012, Flute Performance

A space had been cleared as a dance floor in the middle of the bar. The crowd formed a circle, anticipating the action with drinks in hand, as a wind quintet unleashed the first raucous chords of Astor Piazzolla’s *Libertango*. After a few minutes of music, a pair of bejeweled dancers swept into the circle, dipping and swinging the piece to its energetic finale.

April 11, 2012, marked an unusual evening at the Butterfly Bar on Manor Road: a DJ, two live bands, and eight classical music acts played between 8 pm and midnight in an event I designed and called *Disco Classical*. Musical acts ranged from brass quintet playing video-game music to flute with electronics; from a string quartet’s Balkan dance tunes to saxophonists hitting tambourines with their feet. Classical acts segued into popular dance music at the top of each hour.

Throughout my time at the Butler School, I’ve wanted to create a classical music experience that was engaging for people who didn’t already love it. My goal with *Disco Classical* was to bring people together in a familiar environment where they could experience something they had probably never heard before—a variety of musical styles and combinations of musicians. I wanted someone to walk away saying, “Wow, that was cool, I’m going home and looking up more music like that!”

While some in the audience weren’t as eager to dance (the “disco” part of *Disco Classical*), my friends and I were. The atmosphere was extremely relaxed and full of good cheer. Patrons approached me expressing their excitement about the music and the way it was presented, and although I had not given thought to a second installment of *Disco Classical*, I was assured by many people that they would be present and bring their friends to the next one!

Full of amazingly creative people with diverse interests and backgrounds, UT is an ideal environment for turning an idea into a reality. Over forty individuals were involved in the making of *Disco Classical* from start to finish, most of whom were students. Two incredible resources at the Butler School facilitated the process, and will doubtless fuel many other students’ creative musical projects in the future. First, a student group called *Classical Reinvention* formed at the Butler School in January 2012, dedicated to presenting classical music in newly inviting and engaging ways. The Butler School Outreach Office provided the crucial inspiration and knowledge necessary to get started and see the event through to the finish. Outreach Coordinator Evan Leslie specializes in projects that bring classical music out of Bates Recital Hall and into the Austin community. Evan patiently mentored me through the process of producing an event from scratch. I’m also profoundly grateful for the support and inspiration of my flute teacher, Professor Marianne Gedigian.

Looking back on *Disco Classical*, I realized that creative presentation and programming of music can encourage listeners to step into the unfamiliar and gain new perspectives to carry into their personal and professional lives. By celebrating communities (in this case UT’s nightlife-loving students) and introducing them to new sounds and experiences, I can link my passion for playing to a broader goal: using music to build a cooperative global community with concert experiences that encourage creative thinking and open-mindedness.