From the Editor

Every summer, after what feels like the best Humboldt ever, I ponder what it is that makes this chamber music workshop essential. I love workshops, and have enjoyed every one I’ve been lucky enough to attend, but the heart of my summer, the still point in a turning world, is always Humboldt.

Part of it has to be the place. After the hot drive up through the Ukiah Valley and across the Russian River watershed, the first glimpse of Humboldt Bay as you coast down the hill from Fortuna comes like a long exhale of relief and gratitude. It’s still there! Then there are the beautiful redwood trees, alive with nature spirits, who I like to think gather above the hall each year to hear us play. The trees, the water and the cool moist air are delights in themselves, but they’re background to the real joy of the workshop: the way we arrive, excited as kids at camp, to play and play and then, when we’re completely exhausted, to freelance.

That’s what brings us back, so many of us, year after year. I save my programs, and I’m looking now at the ones from my first Humboldt, Week 3 of 1986, to see if anyone else from back then showed up this summer, 26 years farther down the road. Sure enough, I see four people, two couples as it happens: Alan and Barbara Mullens Geier, not yet risen to their current eminence, Joselyn Bartlett, still living in Santa Barbara, and Tony Miksak, already in Mendocino. The programs from 1987 give me seven more: Adrienne Casco and Molly Banks, both of whom I played with this year, Leo Kadehjian, Susan Breitbard, Joe Beck, Jonathan Lehan and Todd Wetherwax. On the 1986 list I spot Al Kaufman, one of the founders of CMNC, and in 1987 there are the

THE NEXT CMNC WORKSHOP

CMNC Workshop at Mills College in October

by Bill Horne, Workshop Director

The next CMNC Workshop will be at Mills College in Oakland, on the weekend of October 20–21, 2012. We are delighted to be returning to the charming venue of Mills College. As usual for the fall workshop, the format will be one assignment per day, coaching both days. Preformed groups will be accepted for one day only. We usually enjoy particularly fine weather at that time of year.

Anna Pressler, violin, Tanya Tomkins, cello and Eric Zivian, piano of the Left Coast Ensemble will be performing.

The weekend promises a wonderful lineup of coaches, and an outstanding performance is planned. We will hear a piano trio from The Left Coast Ensemble, featuring Anna Pressler, violin; Tanya Tomkins, cello; and Eric Zivian, piano.

We also look forward to the catering at Mills, which is a cut above usual college fare. We are hoping for the usual large turnout for this popular workshop, so sign up early. Just go to CMNC.org and log in to apply. Thanks to the CMNC Challenge donations, we have been able to keep the fee for the Mills weekend steady, with a slightly reduced charge for one-day attendance. We are holding applications open until after Labor Day.

Continues page 2.
Preformed Ensembles

I would like to invite everyone who can to consider applying as a preformed group. We believe that, like so many aspects of life, the more effort you put into something, the more you will get out of it. Coaching gives each of us an opportunity to be educated about the subtle skills of playing our unique art form, chamber music, which requires a great deal of attention to others’, as well as one’s own, notes. Having a chance to be coached is always a learning experience. However it is also an opportunity to select a piece you would like to play with friends you are comfortable playing with, and do some rehearsing before the workshop. Particularly for string players, this allows a lot of their myriad choices of how to bow and finger parts to be worked out in advance, as well as for pianists to try to acquaint themselves with most of their notes! For any of us, being preformed is a chance to stretch ourselves a bit and try something a little out of our comfort zone.

I must admit I personally relish just sight-reading and playing, but I have discovered that I, too, get more out of workshop days when I have prepared and rehearsed. Among strings, our research into the past several years of workshops has revealed that our more experienced players more often choose to come preformed. I would like to encourage intermediate players to consider preforming too. I think you could enhance your weekend experience and gain a few new skills, which you could build on with your group into the future. I am delighted to note that woodwind groups have started coming preformed also, and working on some very challenging repertoire.

Some have commented that they would like to come preformed both days, but we have not allowed that, as we hope that players will also enjoy mixing and playing with other chamber musicians. It is always a balance to strike at workshops between the advantages of rehearsing in advance and the opportunity to encounter new music and players.

Others cannot preform for various reasons. I hasten to add that there is just as much fun to be had attending a weekend as an individual. There is nothing wrong at all with just enjoying the pleasure of playing together, and if that is what you prefer, then go for it.

I look forward to seeing many of you in October at the workshop. Our hard-working board of directors will do their best to provide an exciting and enjoyable weekend.

—Elizabeth Morrison
Musical Taste

by Elizabeth Morrison

For the home coffee roaster, Sweet Maria’s website offers choices of green coffee for every possible taste. My current favorite Ethiopian beans bear this description: “An amazingly delicate, sweet cup with jasmine, tangerine and caramel accented with grape acidity, vanilla, honey and floral character.” I like this. Not only is it excellent taste vocabulary, it’s fitting that attention be paid to so important a sensory event. Wine is another source of adventurous descriptions, with wine notes ranging from James Thurber’s classic “A naive domestic Burgundy without any breeding, but I think you’ll be amused by its presumption;” to a Chowhound.com blogger’s “Like Britney Spears: lacking substance, depth and thoughtfulness, but very well put together and improbably fascinating.”

We all have our own particular penchants; we tend to like our tempi fast or slow, our tone rich or delicate, our ritards subtle or over the top.

Talking about musical taste should only be this much fun. We all have our own particular penchants; we tend to like our tempi fast or slow, our tone rich or delicate, our ritards subtle or over the top. We love or hate glissandi. We like a closely blended group sound, or we want to hear each instrument as an individual voice. In performance we want lots of eye contact, or we want to play and breathe together without all that intrusive staring; we hope to move expressively or sit in dignified stillness, to stand, to mug, or to ignore the audience completely.

Everything that is optional in a performance, after all, reflects choices by the performers, and is ultimately a matter of taste. What’s behind these choices? How can we describe, discuss and negotiate matters of taste with our colleagues? What is the elusive quality called “good taste?” How do we get it, and do we even want it? By considering musical taste with at least as much enthusiasm as Sweet Maria’s ponders coffee, we may be able to enlarge our repertoire of enjoyment and pleasure, and also broaden our ability to make choices in our own playing.

To start us off I have prepared a short taste test. Here are three groups playing the slow movement of Schubert’s B flat piano trio, Opus 99, brought to us by the miracle of YouTube:

1. Alfred Cortot, piano, Jacques Thibaud, violin, and Pablo Casals, cello. Click here for video.
2. Hepzibah Menuhin, piano, Yehudi Menuhin, violin, Maurice Gendron, cello. Click here for video.
3. Vladimir Ashkenazy, piano, Pinchas Zukerman, violin, Lynn Harrell, cello. Click here for video.

When you’ve listened to the selections, the test is to decide:

1. Which one you like best. (You will like them all. Each is a beautiful performance by three great musicians. But go ahead and choose your favorite.)
2. How they are different. Really, specifically how?
3. And for extra credit, how you can most evocatively describe each one (think wine or coffee).

You’ll find an answer key on page 5. No, wait! There can’t be an answer key, because the subject is taste, and we all know that de gustibus non est disputandum—there is no arguing about taste. Or so the saying goes, but the usual takeaway, that taste is purely subjective and so not subject to dispute, is not what it really says. The full pronunciation goes, “De gustibus et coloribus non est disputandum”—there is no arguing about taste and color. “Taste” refers not to your personal jones, but to what you actually taste, with your mouth. What we can’t argue about is the sensory underpinnings of an experience. We taste, smell, see, feel and hear what we do and that’s that. Permission is granted to dispute freely about what we like, and why.

This is a productive direction, because neuroscience can now tell us a lot about what is happening physiologically while we are busily liking or not liking a musical performance, or indeed any work of art. We can account for both our differences in taste and also for its sameness, the parts we have in common and the reason we are having the conversation in the first place. I might like a bright Ethiopian

Continues on page 4.
Musical Taste, continued from page 3.

coffee (it’s that caramel); you prefer a rich earthy bean from, well, Java, but we both love our morning cup. I like Casals, you prefer Gendron; we both love the cello, and everyone loves Schubert. Our differing tastes are in the context of our shared passion for chamber music.

A recent book by the Nobel Prize-winning neurobiologist Eric R. Kandel called The Age of Insight: The Quest to Understand the Unconscious in Art, Mind and Brain, From Vienna 1900 to the Present, helpfully applies a scientist’s understanding to questions of how and why we appreciate works of art. He focuses on painting, looking first at the work of three artists from early 20th century Vienna, and then at the neural mechanisms with which we process visual experiences into artistic ones. For music, the details of the neural pathways involved are different, but the basic story is the same. The transformation of sensory input into an artistic experience is via two separate pathways, which Kandel calls “bottom-up” and “top-down.”

Bottom-up experience consists of the mechanisms for processing sensory data. For music this is the apparatus of hearing, which begins when pressure waves in the air are caught by the outer ear, then moves to the eardrum where the energy of sound is transferred to mechanical energy, to the inner ear where it becomes fluid waves, to the cochlea where these waves trigger the release of neurotransmitters onto the auditory nerve. Sound is now a brain event, and can be processed into music.

The membranes and hair cells in the cochlea are sensitive to intensity (loudness) and pitch, so the materials by which we enjoy melody, harmony, dynamics and the rest are in place. The next stop is the brain stem, which is also involved in the location of sound, and gives us the ability to hear individual notes, a function possibly rooted in our need to locate prey or potential mates. No wonder music is so thrilling. Bring on the food and sex!

Top-down processing happens almost simultaneously in the cerebral cortex, and involves higher brain functions of memory and organization. It is a big job to construct a musical experience. We need short-term memory even to follow a melodic line, long-term memory to understand what we are hearing, and great organizing skills to create a coherent whole out of a complex barrage of sounds. The auditory cortex is an amazing place; on the right-brain side it hears and analyzes harmonic relations and overtones, while the left-brain side figures out relationships between successions of sounds so that we can experience melodies and rhythm. These are the same areas where language processing occurs; it seems likely that music and language are processed in similar ways and by similar brain structures (thus songs also have lyrics, and there is opera.)

Music is not what comes in from outside; music is what we construct inside ourselves. What we hear is essentially ambiguous; our task is to resolve the ambiguity of sound into meaning. John Cage said that any sequence of sounds he heard three times became music, though that may have been before the invention of car alarms. Listening is a creative act, performed by complex functions of attention, and requires us to compare what we are hearing to musical models we have constructed in the past. This is what Kandel calls the “ beholder’s share.” The listener is an essential participant in the existence of music; without the beholder, or the listener, there is only data, not art.

And of course all the while we are engaged in this mostly unconscious high-brain neural processing, we are very consciously reacting emotionally. Taste is fundamentally

Music is not what comes in from outside; music is what we construct inside ourselves. What we hear is essentially ambiguous; our task is to resolve the ambiguity of sound into meaning.

_The ability to hear individual notes is a function possibly rooted in our need to locate prey or potential mates. No wonder music is so thrilling. Bring on the food and sex!_
Musical Taste, continued from page 4.

Emotional, a biochemical cascade of positive or negative feelings. Emotions themselves are instinctive biological mechanisms; they color our lives and help us with our evolutionary task of seeking pleasure (food, sex, social approval) and avoiding pain (poison, predators, ostracism.) Darwin pointed out that emotions benefit survival with the role they play in selecting a mate; Freud, who read and was influenced by Darwin, thought that consciousness may have evolved so that we could “feel” our emotions and extend their reach into rational action. In music, as in all things, we make decisions based not just on whether we can do something but on whether it will be rewarding to do it. The intense high you can get from a perfectly executed ritard? That’s what it’s really all about.

We are now finally in the realm of individual taste. What we like is orchestrated by our entire being; our taste is who we are, in a rising pyramid of differentiation. We like music because we are human beings, we like particular kinds of music because we are rooted in our time, place and culture, and we like different ways of playing that music because we are the individuals we are. Musical taste reflects our personality, our teachers and training, the quantity and quality of our exposure to music, the focus of attention that we choose to bring to it, and much more. Our taste might even reflect our personality deficits. Forceful, uplifting music is known to relieve depression, while “persuasive sound,” as Congreve calls it, hath charms to soothe the savage breast. Just as one’s drug of choice might be an upper or a downer (that is, coffee or wine) depending on whether you are characteristically jumpy or slug-like, one’s musical taste could be for relief from whatever ails you. Or, like most of us, you may simply like to time your drugs; Shostakovich in the morning, Bach at night.

In the hierarchy of appreciation, the differences we seize upon as matters of taste are comparatively subtle. After all, most of the parameters of a performance are explicitly laid down by the composer. The rhythm, melody and harmony will (we hope) be the same no matter who is playing.

To engage the emotions of taste, whatever variations the performers can introduce need to be exaggerated, so the listener can notice and love them, or not. Here again, neurological research provides insight. A liking for exaggeration is a bottom-up quality, built into our perceptual apparatus. As an example, British ethologist Niko Tinbergen, in a study of baby gulls, found that a gull chick begs for food by pecking a prominent red spot on its mother’s yellow beak, which causes the mother to regurgitate food and feed the chick. Tinbergen then tested, in effect, the baby’s taste by showing it just a beak, unattached to a gull body. The baby pecked enthusiastically. He then showed just a yellow stick with a red stripe painted on it—gull art, if you will. Again, vigorous pecking. Finally, Tinbergen showed the baby a yellow stick with three red stripes. Baby gull went nuts, and in fact strongly preferred this stick to his mother.

We like to think we’re not so gullible, but I think this is an important point about musical taste. “Good taste” as conventionally defined is moderate and not exaggerated, and yet really, extremes are more attractive and certainly much more fun. Coaches are always urging us to do more, to exaggerate dynamics, take more time, play more expressively. Bob Swan often asks what terrible thing would happen if we played, just this once, way over the top. Burke Schuchmann says he rarely, if ever hears a performance in bad taste; there is usually no taste at all. Randy Fisher has a standing offer in his coaching sessions to pay $20 to anyone who can get the other players to say an effect was too much. He has never had to pay. We imagine we are totally overdoing a ritard or a dynamic change, but our colleagues can be counted on to chorus, “You could do much more.” William Blake tell us that “the road to excess leads to the palace of wisdom…for we never know what is enough until we know what is more than enough.” Okay, maybe we should try to find out!

We come now finally to the promised Answer Key, really just my responses to the Taste Test with which we began this article. I chose the three renditions of the Schubert because each one, while unquestionably in perfect taste, takes something all the way. In the Thibaud, Cortot and Casals it is the slides; they are quite breathtaking. This is a

"Good taste" as conventionally defined is moderate and not exaggerated, and yet really, extremes are more attractive and certainly much more fun.

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Maurice Gendron

Continues page 6.
different Casals from the man we know from the Bach Suites. I didn’t realize he played with such sweetness and lyricism. If the piece is a love song between the violin and cello (chaperoned by the piano, who shows inner fire only once), these are young, just-met lovers, sharing confidences as they stroll together in a pure, pristine countryside, their hearts thrilling like birdsong. If your heart doesn’t break when Cortot sings into the key change at 5:45, you have forgotten too much about young love.

The Menuhin-Gendron performance has many wonderful qualities, but I was especially taken by their rubato. Hepzibah Menuhin starts at the same tempo as Cortot, around 30 for the dotted quarter, but their performance manages to be a full half minute longer, most of that filled by Maurice Gendron’s freedom. Nice that this is a video-who knew he was such a heartthrob! Yehudi is too in his way but forgive me, this piece is about the cello. These two are grownup lovers, sexual, passionate and committed. Their performance is like a great red wine: smooth, luscious, noble. It’s also more of a trio, with Hepzibah playing her role with subtle nuances. I like her accents in the first bar, a bit of spice setting up Gendron’s opening swoon.

The third performance, with Ashkenazy, Zukerman and Harrell, is witty and contemporary. These are lovers who are also old friends; they seem to know each others’ minds well, and the interaction has elements of repartee. They know how to wait; Zukerman doesn’t fully respond Harrell’s opening until much later (watch him at 5:50) (and watch Harrell watching him!) The balance between them is amazing. This is not wine, it is coffee, which is by no means a lesser drink. If wine, the gift of Bacchus, inspires us to sing, dance, fight and make love, coffee, the wine of Apollo, prods us to talk, think, write and play chess. It occurs to me that the performance has elements of a chess game. Harrell’s bow stroke at :51 is a move, perfectly countered by Zukerman’s at 1:01. By the time they get 6:20 their conversation is, like great chess, completely individual and also supported by centuries of thought by brilliant, expansive minds. Ashkenazy, a generation older, looks on the lovers with dignified and affectionate amusement.

And now, to complete the test, I need to pick my favorite. If Harrell’s group is coffee and Gendron’s is wine, Casals’ group is water from the spring I love best in the world, beside the Kern River in the southern Sierra, bright and faintly carbonated, like heaven’s blessing after a long mountain walk. Which one do I choose, which one, which one?
Gems from the Evaluations

by Miriam Blatt

After every workshop I am very interested to read all of your thoughtful feedback you provide in the online evaluation form. Recently the form has included a question asking what words of wisdom you learned from our coaches. Here are some from the last workshop, quoted with permission.

From Eddie Guarino, clarinet, coached by Deborah Pittman: Rests are NOT pauses. They are “ready, play” signs. Don’t get behind the beat!

From Joe Beck, violin, coached by Susan Bates: Susan had us go through a group bow pantomime with vocalization of dynamics, to help us with our group and individual grooving of a section with syncopation, rests, and dynamic contrasts. This quickly eliminated the potential confusion from the relatively unusual and unexpected pattern. It was very helpful, since the section worked only if we all felt the rhythmic and dynamic pattern together.

From Judy Walker, piano, coached by Cynthia Darby: I think my personal take-away from this workshop is that chamber music is all about setting your ego aside and focusing on the collective effort. Do not think of it as your set of fingers playing your notes and interpreting them your way. It’s the combined molding together of everybody’s skills to produce the collective best that you can. Pretty obvious, I know, but whereas I was aware of this intellectually, I don’t think I’ve ever internalized it at a more emotional level as much as I was able to on Saturday. That alone was worth the price of admission!

At this particular workshop, one coach, Fred Lifsitz, the second violinist in the Alexander Quartet, was quoted extensively. Fred talked a lot about bringing to life the inner parts that are too often buried and not audible to the listener. Here are some of his comments, as noted by various participants.

Elizabeth Morrison, cello: Fred told us that his bow never leaves the string. Well, hardly ever. The inner voices really have to play up. When he joined the Alexander Quartet, Sandy Wilson, the cellist, told him he had to play at least as loudly as the cello, if not louder—and Sandy is a very strong presence indeed. Fred still can’t believe how loudly he has to play his part.

Felicity McCarthy, viola: Fred said, referring to exposed, soft passages in the opus 130 string quartet of Beethoven, “…the viola and second violin can up the volume two notches and that will still barely be enough. It does NOT sound crude, and it is NOT loud enough…” In general, second violin and viola are almost always too soft/shadowed. Especially when playing thematic material, or other interesting lines, or when overpowered by the first violin and/or the cello.

When coaching my group, Fred tossed out the top four things everyone learns from listening to recordings of their practice sessions:

1. Play the soft sections softer, for greater dynamic contrast.
2. Take more time at transitions. Add commas where that makes sense.
3a. Begin crescendi, decrescendi, accelerandi and ritardandi later than written. Also, all these need to be spread over multiple measures, rather than diving immediately to the end point.
3b. Consider doing the reverse beforehand. For example, do a decrescendo right before beginning a crescendo, to create a bigger contrast that will be more audible to the listener.

These are classics for good reasons. I often end up writing in “p” or “pp” several times, so that I don’t forget from one line to the next that I am supposed to be playing softly.

Coming back to the topic of inner voices playing out, here is my standard rule for violin 2 and viola playing: Jump on anything that looks like it might be interesting, and keep playing louder until somebody complains. (Once in a while they do complain, but that is relatively rare.)

This is especially true for viola, which has the handicap of being undersized relative to its pitch range. While it is convenient to hold a viola like a violin under the chin, nobody can hold up a viola that is large enough to resonate in a way that matches violins and cellos. So the viola is always at risk of being buried. And there will never be a perfect standard size for violas.

For some entertaining cartoons on viola playing, along with excellent arrangements of music for four violas, take a look at http://www.absolutezeroviola4.com.

Your evaluation comments are always welcome; do keep writing about your workshop experiences! ☮
WORKSHOP DIRECTOR’S REPORT

CMNC Workshop at San Francisco State University, May 25–26, 2012

by Maria Reeves

The Spring 2012 workshop at SFSU went very well, thanks to a lot of hard work by many people. I’d like to start by thanking Todd Roehrmann, Associate Dean for Creative Art in the College of Arts and Humanities at San Francisco State, Melinda Zarrett and Kirk Schaible, Creative Arts Event Management, and Debra Varner, Director of OLLI, without whose help we could not have had a workshop. The weather cooperated, with two days of clear skies and warm temperatures. To make it even better we were able to have all our meals in Cesar Chavez Student Center, with an excellent caterer. The stage was set for a happy weekend of chamber music.

As is our custom at the spring workshop, there was coaching of all groups on Saturday, culminating in performance samplers at 4:00 p.m. This year we divided the sampler in half rather than by thirds, so each performance was comprised of 12, not 8, groups. This necessitated limiting our playing to five minutes each, which with few exceptions and a few grumblings, worked pretty well. In order to speed up the process we left the left front row seats empty, where the upcoming group sat, their instrument cases on the stage before them. This way they were ready to play as soon as the last group finished. On Sunday, all players who came as individuals had separate morning and afternoon sight-reading sessions. Only those who chose to come in preformed groups had coaching.

There were 136 applications. Of these we were able to accept 116 and partially accept 12 (these players were accepted for one day instead of two.) There were just a few waitlisted players due to work-shop balance. We were lucky to have no last-minute cancellations; one ailing pianist was not sure she could make it; she called Thursday evening to say she was in for Saturday. Crisis averted, and we thank her for coming despite her difficulties.

On Saturday there were 24 groups, with eight piano groups. Four were preformed. The mix was 10 string-only groups, four winds only, two mixed wind and strings, and eight piano groups, including five with strings, one with winds, and two with mixed strings and winds.

On Sunday morning there were four preformed groups, and we were able to make up 17 groups of the

The peasants have come down from the country. In this case it’s Sheri Schultz, Harriett Spiegel, Ray Van Diest and Tom Diskin who came from the area around Redding to play Dvorak.

PHOTO CREDIT: SUSAN WILSON

Lunch with coaches Yael Ronen, flute, and Burke Schuchmann, cello, is always amusing.

Continues page 9
people who came as individuals. There were eight string groups, three winds-only, two mixed, and four piano groups in the session. The afternoon session varied slightly, with seven string-only, four winds-only, two mixed, and again four piano groups. The preformed groups could choose to take part in an optional performance sampler at the end of the day; only one, a string quartet, chose to do this. Many people stopped by to hear their excellent performance.

We were lucky to have a fabulous raft of coaches, led by our hosts at SFSU, the Alexander String Quartet: Zakarias Grafilo and Fred Lifsitz, violins, Paul Yarbrough, viola, and Sandy Wilson, cello. We also had many of our favorites: Susan Bates, viola; Cynthia Darby, piano; David Granger, bassoon; Laura Reynolds, oboe; Yael Ronen, flute; Burke Schuchmann and Tom Stauffer, cellos, and Alicia Telford, horn. At the coaches’ concert in Knuth Hall the Alexander String Quartet presented us with an inspiring potpourri of Jerome Kern, Schubert, Bartok and Kodaly. We had freelancing available on Saturday night, and 11 groups participated. Elizabeth Morrison and Susan Kates served as freelance coordinators.

I would like to thank the Board members and other volunteers who worked with me to make my job as Workshop Director easier. I feel very fortunate in having joined the board after the Workshop Planner software has evolved, with Carolyn Lowenthal’s expertise, into a truly remarkable tool for managing the workshop. Carolyn and Elizabeth helped me in my learning process and I am definitely making progress. Kudos to Bob Goldstein for stepping in as our most reassuring host for the orientation meeting, and even bigger ones for making sure we got the best food ever from the caterer; several players raved about the food, which was delicious and also, this time, sufficient. He and Susan Wilson were Facilities Coordinators and did a great job there too. Thanks to Sue Fowle and Harry Chomsky for their excellent-as-usual management of the database and website. Sheri Schultz held the financiers together, keeping track of payments, registration, refunds, and budgeting. I much appreciate the help Miriam Blatt and Bill Horne provided in helping me with the piano assignments. As in previous workshops, board members were invaluable in all aspects of planning, from workshop balance to final assignments: Susan Kates, Alan Kingsley and Bob Goldstein for winds, Elizabeth, Carolyn, Miriam Blatt, Bob Nesbet, Susan Wilson and Marion Taylor for strings.

We are grateful for the invaluable assistance of workshop volunteers Harry Bernstein, Gloria Bloemberg, Peggy George, Jordan Kirkner, Diane Larrabee, Harriet Spiegel, and Sonia Tubridy, who were organized by Susan Wilson. The CMNC library, so well maintained and enhanced by Marion Taylor, and so well handled at the workshop by Mike Irvine, makes the assignments for this and all other CMNC workshops possible. Finally, I would like to thank all the participants for coming to the workshop and sharing your love of chamber music with our community.

I especially thank the participants for coming and playing with us. We treasure the feeling of community we get at each and every one of our workshops.
The Juilliard Quartet Comes to CMNC in February 2013!

CMNC and the May Treat Morrison Chamber Music Center are delighted to announce that the Juilliard Quartet will play a full quartet concert on Sunday, February 10, 2013, at San Francisco State University, as part of the Morrison Artist Series. The quartet will also give a special program of four master classes at the CMNC workshop on February 9, 2013. The master classes are made possible partly by the CMNC Challenge Fund, for which we thank our generous donors.

To make this event possible, we are planning some changes to our usual procedures, for this workshop only. On Saturday, each of the members of the Juilliard (Joseph Lin and Ronald Copes, violins, Samuel Rhodes, viola, and Joel Krosnick, cello) will each give a master class for four groups of CMNC participants. The master classes will take place from 4:30 to 6:30 and will take the place of our usual coaches’ concert. At the February workshop we normally have 24 to 28 groups on Saturday, and the four Juilliard master classes can only accommodate 16 groups. The other 8 to 12 groups will be able to choose to attend a Juilliard master class or to join with others in master classes with one of our great regular coaches.

Preformed groups are likely to benefit the most from the Juilliard coaching, so now is not too early to start thinking about forming a group for February and practicing something you would like to play. We do not yet know how we should choose the groups for these master classes. This announcement will appear on the evaluation form after the October workshop, so if you have a good idea about how to do this, please let us know there or just send an email to mail@cmnc.org.

On Sunday we may start the workshop an hour earlier than usual, at 8:00 a.m. instead of 9:00, so that we can end the workshop at 2:45, and all participants who wish to do so will be able to attend the (free) Juilliard concert.

CMNC Challenge Fund at Work!

The February and June 2012 workshops at SFSU benefitted from the money raised last fall in the Challenge Campaign, which kicked off at the Mills workshop in October 2011. With careful use of the fund, we have been able to:

• Keep fees the same or lower, despite increased costs.
• Provide financial aid to promote workshop balance for all of us.
• Add new works to the CMNC library, and acquire scores for works we own so they can be used for coaching.
• Invite the Juilliard Quartet to give master classes in February 2013

Have a financial cushion for emergencies.

Thanks again to all our donors!
Practicing for a Performance

by Bob Swan

“I love those lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer...”. I take that old song pretty seriously, especially the first part. But I have a performance coming up in three weeks or so and I must get started. First step, find the viola. After a long separation the heart races just a bit when you open the case - any broken strings, cracks, any bow problems? Nope, now it’s just me, it, and the music. We’ll begin our program with an early Mozart, K 139, technically not a difficult piece at all. I’ll look at that later.

Somewhere over there in those stacks is the viola part to Dvorak’s string quartet opus 96 in F Major, “The American,” a piece I’ve played hundreds of times. I can’t bear digging around for it and risk losing Big Mo so I’ll practice from memory.

I could probably perform it without practicing at all but if one’s to maintain integrity as a musician, one must always start from the beginning when encountering a piece again. I feel like I’m on a roll having opened the case, rosined up, and strapped on the Kun shoulder rest. F Major—ugh. It’s a problematic key; the open C string always sounds flat, the open G a little bit too. I therefore try to squeeze the fifths as closely as I can and have them sound acceptable. A former colleague in my professional life preferred to tune his fifths very open. It made his gorgeous Carlo Tononi viola sound wonderful, relaxed and very rich in overtones. He struggled with the Pastoral Symphony though. Tough choices in music.

The intonation wheels are turning before I even play a note. My C string is purposefully high so where do I place the first note, the F? A normal melodic fourth from the C doesn’t work. Look at the A and D that are looming: the D clearly it must be in tune with the D string. I take that pentatonic kernel (F, A, C, D, F) and play it repeatedly, in different orders, in many rhythms, always checking with the open C and D strings until an acceptable intonation compromise is found. Ooops! It’s 15 minutes later and I’ve just finished with the first bar. That’s okay. A lot of this piece is in F Major so I’m working on that too. Retune. By the way, the mental note I’ve made reminds me that I must revisit this opening solo with Dr. Beat playing eighth notes loudly through the stereo. It’s pretty easy to be lazily creative with the rhythm and pulse here. I discovered to my horror just a couple of years ago that I’d been screwing up the rhythm on the second beat of bar 4, playing something like 32nds instead of true 16ths. In bar 5 of the piece I focus on the open C, getting it to sound immediately by finding the right combination of contact point, bow speed, and pressure. The dotted 1/8 should be tenuto, only two accents in the bar on beats 1 and 3. By observing Dvoraks’s expression mark, the crescendo and diminuendo in bar 6, we return to a feeling of 4 beats in a bar. I like that contrast and spend a few minutes making it sound musically convincing and not just like an idea from an analysis class. 35 minutes already!

I played this piece a couple of years ago with a fine cellist from the National Symphony who in bar 17 played open D and A strings in that solo. I tried it and really liked it. Retune. My teacher, David Dawson, a brilliant violist and chamber musician, thought that the eighth notes in bars 20, 26, and 27 should sound like little drums. I like to play them off the string accenting the first of each group of four. I’ve got to figure out how to sell this idea to my colleagues; after all, there are slur marks over them and there might be a purist in the crowd. Maybe a bargain is in the air. I’ll pull the cellist off to the side and promise to play really pp in the second movement if he’ll support me on this one.

OMG! Look at the clock! 45 minutes already. I’d better lie down; that’s enough for day one. It’s taken all this time just to get close to the double bar. Most of my practice has been very slow, listening very carefully to what I was doing. If you can’t play it slowly you can’t play it fast.

I took yesterday off. The cleaning lady came in the

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morning. Major psychodrama staying that half step in front of her. Then golf and a couple of beers. So I start today with 20 minutes of F Major and C Major scales and arpeggios (I like the Carl Flesch sequence). Slow and careful. 3 octaves. Smooth, greasy shifts always paying attention to left hand position and shape along with perfect right arm posture. I ALWAYS practice standing with the fingerboard parallel to the plane of my large mirror; I can now watch the bow travel parallel to the bridge. Critical! After reviewing the work from a couple of days ago I start at the double bar, measure 64. The most logical way to play this is in third position entirely—no shifts. But there are other perils. The first finger F# can influence you to play the C on the third beat too high. Alert! A nasty habit I have shows up in bar 65. I lazily reach for the C string with just my fingers rather than properly positioning my whole hand. I’m constantly addressing this issue.

The sixteenths that follow have to be played with perfect intonation and rhythm. One hears a lot of fudging when it comes to the rhythmic part. Notes are dropped or chopped when shifting, rushed when it gets difficult, or just plain uneven. Not wanting to be found guilty, I turn to Dr. Beat again. The metronome very loud and me very soft. Slowly at first then building both speed and dynamics. I’ll do this for quite a long time and actually enjoy achieving that beautiful synchronization. A little over an hour has gone by but before I quit, I review all the work done so far trying to tune my ears to what I’m actually playing, not what I wish to hear. Back tomorrow.

It’s 2:40 a.m. and I’m trying to get back to sleep. Instead of counting

jumping over a bar line, I obsess over the opening pentatonic cell intonation. Geez! There it is at the beginning of the second movement in that Sevcik-like viola part. Also the third and fourth movements! Zzzzzz.

A few days more of slow, tedious, careful work have gone by. I really enjoy this kind of practice. But now it’s time to think about how I’d like the music to go. I love the vagueness of the frame before the viola enters starting with the first violinists eighth rest.

Perhaps the first violin should sneak in thereby enhancing it. I like the slightest dynamic push in the violins to the cello entrance and the bar line. All is set up now rhythmically going into the viola. (Maybe I overthink this kind of stuff but it makes music so interesting and compelling for me. Don’t we all walk down the street wondering how some phrase should be played? I think we get a lot done in those moments.)

When I was in my twenties I stuck my chin out and played this opening very operatically. You know what I mean by that. But now I observe the mf and prefer a dusky more reflective character; there’s plenty of time for fireworks later, in bars 80 through 84.

This is where the fireworks go.

I’ve always been befuddled by the rhythm on beats 2 and 4 of bar 80. What is that? Everybody just snaps that rhythm off as if the values were reversed. It must mean something though. For me it implies more gentleness; thus I don’t do much crescendo in the bar. Instead I like to then play bar 81 with a more open and avuncular attitude maintaining that until the “tom toms” in bar 84.

Well it goes on and on like this for the whole piece. It takes a lot of time, this kind of fun. I ponder these problems and solutions while on the golf course, in the shower, and even in the Red Rooster, the country tavern one mile up the road.

What a wonderful obsession, music! ☺
Welcome to New Board Member Karen Wright

Karen Wright’s earliest musical memory is singing harmonies in a children’s choir when she was 4 or 5 years old. Growing up in a family that moved almost every year (and going to nine different schools in twelve years), Karen found music was a way to fit in, a place she knew she belonged. Eager to try any instrument she was offered, she quickly became a skilled trombonist (ruffling a few feathers each time she was awarded first chair in an all-male brass section).

During college, Karen’s focus shifted to singing mezzo-soprano. She enjoyed participating in choruses and performing solos at weddings, parties, and as a church ‘ringer’. She probably would have continued singing, except she married a guy named Hal and had a daughter, Kelly. The music didn’t stop, however; for the next ten years, Karen was a part of Kelly’s school classes, coming in weekly to play guitar (self-taught) and teach the kids folk songs. This was a happy time for both her and the school kids (who still ask Kelly about “Mrs. Wright” at high school reunions, and who, once, tag-teamed to sing ‘High Barbary’ to Karen over the phone).

When Indian Valley College opened, Karen seized the opportunity to earn her AA in Music (and take every music class offered on the curriculum). She noodled around on various instruments, including French horn and piano, until one magical day, at the tender age of 45, she picked up a bassoon. It was love at first honk. The rest is history.

Participating in a chamber music group at College of Marin led to attending the Humboldt Chamber Music Workshop in 1988. This was a life-changing experience. After that first summer at Humboldt, Karen immersed herself in music studies, earning a BA in Music from Sonoma State University. During this time, she was fortunate to begin studying with Rufus Olivier, a master bassoonist (and a great influence).

In addition to playing the bassoon, Karen’s interests include watching and listening to birds, traveling (by car, motorhome, or cruise ship), and defending her title of Scrabble Master. She recently enjoyed her 24th summer at Humboldt!
Pictures from SFSU Workshop—May 2012

Workshop Director Maria Reeves with coach Fred Lifsitz of the Alexander Quartet.

Maria, with friends Chris Carr, Amy Apel and Carol Reitan, gets musical help from Cynthia Darby.

The fashion-conscious Kate Wahl, David Brookes, Mike Irvine and Bob Goldstein all seem to know that orange is THE color this season.

Ralph Morrison looks skeptical about lunch.