



The New York Flute Club

NEWSLETTER

November 2007

MARGARET SWINCHOSKI AND THE PALISADES VIRTUOSI

Interview by Katherine Fink

I have known Margaret Swinchoski for many years and have always been impressed by her energy and enthusiasm for performing. As a resident of Rockland County, home to long stretches of the Hudson River Palisades, I have been riveted by the progress of the Palisades Virtuosi, an ensemble that started with one concert and is now a powerhouse conduit for new repertoire. It is inspiring to see a local group with a focus on living composers grow and flourish in this region and bring so much music into the lives of their audiences. I am also fascinated by Margaret's athletic prowess as a figure skater, especially since she began this sport as an adult. We conducted this interview by email and by phone.

KATHERINE FINK: How and when did the Palisades Virtuosi come together and why did you chose that instrumentation [flute, clarinet, and piano]?

MARGARET SWINCHOSKI: I met our pianist, Ron Levy, in 1991. We bonded immediately, and over the course of the next 11 years we played at least a dozen recitals together, championing and commissioning new works by composers from New Jersey, New York, and Vermont. We collaborated on two works on *From the Hudson Valley*, my solo CD [Albany Records, 1999]: Godfrey Schroth's *Spring in Bucks County*, and Eric Ewazen's *Ballade, Pastorale and Dance*. I met our clarinetist, Don Mokrynski, even earlier, at a reading orchestra in New York City in 1986, and loved his playing. During the '90s, Don was on tour with *Phantom of the Opera*, but we would get together when he was home on breaks and read through trios because we enjoyed making music together. In 2002 he finished the touring and moved back to Bergen County (NJ) with his family. Ron and Don, both from

Bergen County, met in the late 1970s and had been performing together for years.

I will never forget the moment when the idea to form the Palisades Virtuosi came into being. I was driving west on

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In Concert

The Palisades Virtuosi

Margaret Swinchoski, flute
Donald Mokrynski, clarinet
Ron Levy, piano

Sunday, **November 18, 2007**, 5:30 pm
Yamaha Piano Salon, 689 Fifth Avenue
(entrance between Fifth and Madison on 54th Street)

NEW AMERICAN MASTERS

Lep•i•dop•ter•o•lo•gy (2003) <i>New York premiere</i>	Aaron Grad (b. 1980)
Four Movements for Virtuosi (2006) <i>New York premiere</i>	Carlos Franzetti (b. 1948)
Wind-Space—a 9-11 Commemorative (2007) <i>New York premiere</i>	Brian Schober (b. 1951)
Three Scenes from the Mountains (2004)	Robert Manno (b. 1944)
George Washington Slept Here! Variations on <i>Soldier's Joy</i> (2004) <i>New York premiere</i>	John Lampkin (b. 1946)

Program subject to change

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FLUTE HAPPENINGS

NOVEMBER '07

NOV
19

Monday 7:00 pm

SHARON LEVIN conducting the Stamford Young Persons Flute Choir and the Stamford Young Artists Flute Choir in a shared concert with two jazz ensembles.

• Union Baptist Church, 805 Newfield Avenue, Stamford, CT. • Admission is free. • Info, call 203-557-3973 or visit www.syap.org.

NOV
28

Wednesday 7:00 to 9:00 pm

“Theater Pieces for Flute,” the second of four 2007-2008 Diller-Quaile Paula Robison masterclasses. Repertoire: Luciano Berio, *Sequenza*; Claude Debussy, *Syrinx*; Edgard Varèse, *Density 21.5*; and Toru Takemitsu, *Voice*.

• Diller-Quaile School of Music, 24 East 95th Street, NYC. • Info, call 212-369-1484 x26, email ejanzen@diller-quaile.org, or visit www.diller-quaile.org.

NOV
30

Friday 8:00 pm

The Jamie Baum Septet with **JAMIE BAUM**, flute, playing original modern jazz compositions and arrangements from her soon-to-be released CD.

• The All Things Project & JazzUnderGround, 269 Bleecker Street (between 6th & 7th Avenues), NYC. • Admission: no cover, no minimum. • Info, call 212-691-1770, email allthings@ix.netcom.com, or visit www.ncgv.com.

DECEMBER '07

DEC
1

Saturday 8:00 pm

A Comprovisation Series concert featuring the Jamie Baum Septet with **JAMIE BAUM**, flute, in the same program as November 30.

• The Puffin Cultural Forum, 20 Puffin Way (formerly East Oakdene Avenue), Teaneck, NJ. • Admission: \$10 (reservations recommended but not required). • Info, call 201-836-8923 or visit www.puffinfoundation.org.

DEC
2

Sunday 2:00 pm

UpTown Flutes performing “Home for the Holidays,” a program of traditional and contemporary holiday music.

• Franklin Lakes Public Library, 470 DeKorte Drive, Franklin Lakes, NJ. • Admission is free. • Info, call 201-891-2224 or visit www.uptownflutes.com.

Flute Happenings Deadlines

Issue	Deadline	Mail date
December 2007	11/1/07	11/29/07
January 2008	12/13/07	1/10/08
February 2008	1/10/08	2/07/08
March 2008	2/14/08	3/13/08
April 2008	3/13/08	4/10/08
May 2008	4/3/08	5/1/08

Palisades Virtuosi (cont'd from page 1)

Route 4 and was surprised to get a call on my cell phone from Ron, who typically never called the cell phone. He said “Hey, now that Donny is home, why don’t we start a trio?” The idea was greeted with enthusiasm and we began collecting music to create a full-length recital, mixing solos with duos and trios to fill out the program. We performed our first recital in November 2002 on a local series in Nyack (NY). We had a great time rehearsing and performing together and decided to look for more performance opportunities.

When we started to search for more repertoire we realized that there wasn’t much choice. Ron had the inspiration that our mission should be to increase the repertoire for this instrumentation. We contacted composers whose work we knew and loved and asked them if they would write a seven- to ten-minute work for a very modest fee. Having received positive results from everyone we asked, our first season took shape. Ron then suggested that we should create a subscription series at a single venue in order to build an audience base, and that’s exactly what we did. Now we are in our fifth season, having brought 25 new works to our repertoire, a few of which have actually been gifted to us by composers who just really believe in us and in our mission. The vision to form this ensemble is one that we have equally shared and worked toward together. It has truly been a labor of love.

KF: Where do you give concerts?

MS: We have a subscription series in Ridgewood, NJ, at the Unitarian Society, where we perform four concerts a year, with a premiere on each concert. Our programs this season are “Anniversaries” (October), “Shall We Dance” (December), “The Women Speak II” (March), and, to celebrate our fifth anniversary season, “Everything Five” (June). You can read more about these concerts at our website [www.palisadesvirtuosi.org]. We also perform a lot of concerts outside of our series on various other recital series and venues.

KF: How do you finance so many recording and commissioning projects?

MS: Well, as you might imagine, the challenges of forming a new group are mostly financial. In the beginning we all contributed. Our debut CD, *PV in*

Recital, was funded on our own and started out as just a demo CD. It quickly morphed into a full-blown project, and we now sell it at our concerts and as a digital download. We are really proud of it. We’ve become well known for our commissioned works and will perform them at our NYFC recital, but *PV in Recital* gives the flavor of a typical PV subscription series concert, which includes a variety of pieces for different combinations of solos, duos and trios. *New American Masters—Volume One*, which received spectacular reviews from *Fanfare Magazine*, was funded almost completely by our concert fees. We have just finished recording *Volume Two*, which was funded mostly from private donations and sponsors. We now have more concerts, and the additional ticket revenue generated is turned back into our commissioning program. We have also established levels of giving and memberships that allow for contributions to certain projects and concert programs. We have also been very fortunate to have many personal associations with composers who were willing to accept smaller commissions in order to accommodate our meager resources.

KF: Do you write grant proposals yourself or do you hire a professional?

MS: Both Ron and I have written proposals for several grants. We get some writing assistance from our arts consultant, Jeffrey James, who also does our press releases, publicizes our events, and looks for new and interesting performing opportunities and projects. Using a professional grant writer would be a huge asset for us and we are contemplating it at this point.

KF: Your group is self-managed. Did this evolve by default or was it a conscious decision?

MS: Mostly by default. However, we are currently looking into management because none of us has the time it takes to make the calls, send out the press kits and contracts, and get the publicity and follow-up calls done.

KF: Do you share the responsibilities of running the group? If so, describe the jobs and who does what.

MS: We each have our responsibilities. Although we all contribute to the artistic vision and direction of the group, I would say that Ron is the great impresario of our ensemble. He often comes

up with concepts or themes for our programs and then we flesh them out together as a team. Don takes care of creating the demo CDs for grants, and assists with finding sponsors and in-kind services for PV. I handle the day-to-day affairs, including designing and maintaining the website and creating the programs and flyers. I also coordinate the information that is disseminated to the board and to our audiences. Our vision is to eventually have a full-time office person.

KF: How do you resolve musical or personal disagreements in your group?

MS: We wrestle each other to the ground and whoever is strongest wins! No, no, no—just kidding! I think the basic strength of our interaction is that we really like and respect each other and we really love working and performing together. We have our disagreements of course, but we are generally able to work these out.

KF: Have you ever commissioned a work that just didn't appeal to the group or to your audiences?

MS: We have been very fortunate with the works we have received to date. A few pieces were difficult to read because they were handwritten manuscripts, but we resolved that issue by adding a clause to our agreements with the composers. In general, the pieces have been very well received. We always try to ensure that our audience will be connected to the music before we play it. To encourage this, I have expanded my ability to entertain, even incorporating humor into my remarks. I have learned a lot from Ron, who is a master at speaking at concerts and always relates amusing anecdotes about the various composers. In an effort to keep our remarks brief, we decided that it would be wise to put the program notes for each concert on our website. We can refer the audience to the website for details about the composers and keep our remarks focused on the reason for choosing a certain piece, how it reflects the theme of our program, and what our personal connection to the piece may be. This also brings the audience into our thought process and makes them feel involved with us and the music on a whole different level. Our composers have attended their premieres and been present to meet with our audiences. We always have a reception after the con-

certs where people really enjoy talking to the composers about their work.

KF: Knowing what you now know, would you have done anything differently in the early years?

MS: We were not very knowledgeable about the 501(c)(3) process that provides the nonprofit status necessary for grant funding. It would have been better to hire someone to help us with this because it took a very long time to get the status and it was a big headache.



Flute Playing

KF: You graduated with degrees in performing arts and music education from Johnson State College in Vermont [in 1982], and received a MA from the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College [in 1984]. With whom did you study and what were the most important things you learned from each teacher?

MS: In high school, I studied with Edward Powell (son of Verne Q. Powell), who taught me that I could be expressive. In college, I studied with Sophie Sollberger, who taught me *how* to practice and achieve technical proficiency. Later, in New York, I studied with Tom Nyfenger, who changed my embouchure so that I could create colors and shading in my sound. He also gave me a greater knowledge of all kinds of repertoire. For several years after graduate school I worked with Trudy Kane and went through vast amounts of orchestral and opera literature. Trudy is a great coach who really

listens to what you're doing and helps you to maximize the effect of whatever you are trying to achieve. I love working with her and have gone back again and again over the years when I've had to prepare an audition.

KF: Do you have any special practice routines?

MS: I like to use the Maquarre *Daily Exercises* and the Taffanel warm-ups. Once I'm warmed up, I like to do the Bach A minor Partita and the Andersen Op.15, No. 3 from memory. After that, I'm ready to work.

KF: What kind of flute do you play? What do you like about it?

MS: I play a 1977 (non-Cooper scale) Powell, with a Drelinger head. I'm not a "flute jock"; I've played the same combination since 1983. I like it and trust it because I know exactly what to expect when I pick it up. There is one cool thing about my instrument. When I bought the flute in 1977, I was a student of Ed Powell, who had his own little invention, two reshaped rollers on the low C# and C keys, added to the flute. The C key is conical so that it is raised on the right side and eliminates the need for a "gizmo" key. Somehow the invention never caught on, but I think it is so easy to use. There is no stretching or reaching with the little finger, it's just right there!

KF: Has your flute playing changed as a result of working in a chamber music group?

MS: I don't know if my actual flute playing has changed, but since forming the Palisades Virtuosi I have grown tremendously as a performer and I am much more expressive and creative than before. I feel as though I have entered a second career. I was a founding member of another chamber group, the West End Chamber Players, from 1986 to 1991, but I was primarily an orchestra musician during the first part of my career. I was principal flutist with the Westchester Symphony for ten years (before it folded in the wake of 9/11), principal with Harrisburg (PA) Symphony for a year (what a long trip that was!) and I did a lot of subbing in the various regional orchestras and on Broadway. In an orchestra, you are one of many musicians following the lead of one person. Now as one of a

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play: “Focus on the second beat of the measure rather than the first—that will keep the music moving forward.” On tonguing, he likes Andersen’s Op. 15, No. 9b for single and double tonguing, and favors using a soft “D.” In one of his colorful analogies: “Imagine a tennis ball hitting a dead sheep.”

Jayn Rosenfeld (NYFC board member and former NYFC president):

Paul Edmund-Davies had fascinating and critical things to say about Moyse: the exercises are boring and mind-deadening, and you should warm up differently on different days. He suggested that we ornament and expand the Taffanel and Gaubert dailies; make them different, interesting, and harder.

Seth Rosenthal (NYFC board member and publicity director):

The crowd of 80–100 people nearly filled Dorot. We heard lots of funny stories at both the masterclass and Sunday’s concert. One (told at the concert) took place at a *Götterdämmerung* rehearsal with the Royal Opera. Georg Solti was running late, and the principal horn, with whom Solti had feuded before, stopped him in the last act and asked him if he could refer back to the first act. Solti agreed, switched scores back to his first act score, and impatiently waited. The horn then said “Sir Georg, at letter V ...” Solti impatiently turned pages until he finds letter V. “Sir Georg, at measure 233....” So he counts out the measures to the spot, saying “Yes, yes, what is it about that?” Then horn player says, “Well, Sir Georg, I just wanted to let you know that’s my favorite part!”

Palisades Virtuosi (cont’d from page 5)

group of three, I find that I enjoy reaching out to the audience.

Figure Skating

KF: *When did you begin skating and to what level of achievement did you progress?*

MS: I began skating in 1990, inspired by the amazingly committed and charismatic performances of Brian Boitano in the 1988 Calgary Olympic Games. When I started, my hope was just to be able to get some exercise, lose weight, and be able to look as though I knew how to skate a little. The sport quickly became a passion; I was hooked from the first waltz jump. I love the feeling of being in the air! The testing structure in skating is a little complicated to explain, but I have passed about halfway up on the standard structure and all the way on the adult (or masters) structure. I have passed the standard juvenile Free, 3rd Figures, and intermediate Moves (Footwork). In the adult structure I have passed my adult gold Free, and Moves and Figures. I am currently working at the novice level Moves and trying to get my jumps back consistently after having my twin girls six years ago. I have also competed. In 1995 I won the adult silver class one national title in a field of 43 competitors. At my website [www.margaretswinchoski.com], you can click on “My Other Life” on the links page to see my skating story. I haven’t competed in the gold division for several years, but I am trying to make a comeback this season—it’s pretty competitive, so I’ll just be happy to skate well. I am also a gold level test judge, having just received my gold judging appointment this June.

KF: *How often do you skate now?*

MS: I skate about four or five days a week for about 45 minutes to an hour, and I take one or two lessons a week.

KF: *How has skating affected your flute playing and musicianship?*

MS: I think this is my favorite question. Aside from the benefits of feeling healthier, and increasing my breath support and stamina as an athlete, skating has given me a physical sense of stretched lines. This has translated into my music and performance by allowing me to feel music on a more emotional and physical level. I used to feel as

though I were singing a phrase; now there’s an added dimension, a physical sensation to extending a note or a phrase, that just wasn’t there before. I feel the physicality of the glide across the ice as the air spins through the flute. It’s a hard thing to put in words, but there is a definite change in the way music feels.

KF: *What is your favorite non-classical music, and how does it influence your classical performance?*

MS: This is such a hard question. I love so many different types of music and they all influence my playing and my musical wholeness. My favorite folk artist is David Wilcox, whose music is deeply meaningful and beautifully sung. My ears have been opened up to a lot of new sounds since I became enamored of the skating world. I previously listened mostly to serious classical music but I began to enjoy other types of music when I observed them being used in programs by other skaters. Sound tracks for movies and certain pop and folk artists are especially good for skating. At the risk of sounding hokey, I do love the big movie music of John Williams because it just picks me up and carries me. Maybe it’s just because it’s great music for skating!

KF: *What are some of the highlights of your program for the Flute Club?*

MS: The program we will perform for the NYFC will include three of our commissioned works. Robert Manno’s *Three Scenes from the Mountains* is a beautiful, reflective tone poem in three short movements, inspired by the Catskill Mountains, where the composer resides. We will also perform Brian Schober’s commemorative piece about 9/11, called *Wind-Space*, and *Four Movements for Virtuosi*, a truly great addition to the repertoire for this instrumentation—with colors ranging from ethereal to jazzy to seductive, by Grammy Award-winning composer Carlos Franzetti.

KF: *That sounds like a fantastic program. I am so glad that you will be sharing these new works with us and am really looking forward to a great concert.* □

Katherine Fink is a member of the *Borealis Wind Quintet*, principal flute of the *Brooklyn Philharmonic* and the *New York Pops*, and on the faculty of *New Jersey City University*.

The New York Flute Club's 2007 Annual Fall Ensembles Gathering

**Sunday, November 4, 2007,
2:00 to 4:00 pm**

Shetler Studios
244 West 54th Street,
12th floor/Penthouse, New York, NY
Info and RSVP,
email Ensembles Coordinator
Annette Baron at
EnsemblesNYFC@aol.com.