

AMERICAN CHAMBER ENSEMBLE CELEBRATES 40TH ANNIVERSARY

by Naomi Drucker,
Clarinetist and Director

January 2005 marked the 40th anniversary of the American Chamber Ensemble (ACE). In 1965, pianist Blanche Abram and I formed ACE. We were young mothers and musicians, determined to continue making our place in the world of music. In a world very different from today, with a strong sense of place and a need to perform close to home, the music journey began in libraries and churches and for civic organizations. ACE brought imaginative concerts for clarinet and/or piano with strings, woodwinds and voice to an audience eager to hear the world's great chamber music in local venues.

Now in its 40th year of continuous performances, ACE has a superb reputation and loyal audience for its concerts, recordings, commissions, world premieres and support of American music and Long Island composers.

In 1978, ACE began a residency at Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York, which continues to this day. Because ACE is Long Island-based, it has, since 1980, included at each concert a work celebrating the Festival of Long Island Composers. The purpose is to help our audience realize that today's composer could be their neighbor, whose contribution to our culture, although relatively unrecognized, is very important.

Although venues have included the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., Weill Hall at Carnegie Hall, the 92nd St. YMHA, CAMI Hall, Christ and St. Stephen's Church, the Nassau County Museum of Art, and prestigious universities, it is the Long Island audience that is the soul of our American Chamber Ensemble.

As part of our 40th anniversary celebration, Elysium Records released in March of 2005 **The American Chamber Ensemble Plays Peter Schickele**, four chamber works of this American master, who conducted and participated in the recording sessions.

ACE has commissioned and presented world premiers by Long Island composers Elie Siegmeister, Albert Tepper, Marga Richter, Dana Richardson, Edward Small-done, Jerry Rizzi, Herbert Deutsch, Leo Kraft, Benjamin Lees, Adrienne Elisha, Julie Mandel, Arkady Kougell and Irwin Swack; and American composers Meyer Kupferman, Vally Weigl, Max Lifschitz, David Hollister, Joelle Wallach, Katherine Hoover and Josef Alexander.

We have also performed music by American composers Morton Gould, Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, Leonard Bernstein, Judith Lang Zaimont, Philip James, Miriam Gideon, Daniel Gregory Mason, Charles Ives, George Kleinsinger, Douglas Moore, Amy Beach, George Gershwin, Alan Hovhaness, Robert Starer, Haskell Small, David Schiff, Robert Muczynski, Howard Boatwright, and many others. We have recorded works by these composers for Elysium, Leonardo, Gasparo, Soundspells, Cala, Dionysus and 4Tay.

I have worked with my colleague and co-director, pianist Blanche Abram, for 40 years, and a better partnership cannot be found. We met when our children were ba-

bies, and while life with all its duties, complications and joys has swirled around us, we have continued giving our ACE concerts, practicing, rehearsing, and being friends. With our wonderful musicians, we have performed most of the chamber music available to our combination of instruments. The core members of ACE, who have performed with us for 25 years, are Marilyn Sherman Lehman, piano; Eriko Sato, violin; Deborah Wong, violin; Lois Martin, viola; and Chris Finckel, cello.

I want to tell you about my very ordinary background. I am from Long Island, a local product of this place, like Long Island potatoes or Great South Bay clams. I was born and grew up in Freeport, at a time when nobody locked their back doors, everyone walked to school, and summers were spent at Jones Beach. Music was a natural part of life in my home, for my Dad played the saxophone and clarinet in dance bands, for shows and in nightclubs.

I started to play my Dad's clarinet at age 8. I loved the sound of the clarinet, loved learning to play, and soon became a big shot player in the fourth grade. My father encouraged and supported me every day of my life. He told me that I could become anything I wanted to be. There was no limit or obstacle, and being female was a non-factor.

During my student years, I studied clarinet with James DeJesu, Robert Grant, Jan Williams, Gustave Langenus, Clark Brody and Leon Russianoff, and played in every community orchestra from Great Neck to Bay Shore.

While in high school, I became friends with Walter and Gustav Mueller of the Penzel-Mueller Company, and had the thrill of going to their factory in Long Island City, where they assisted me in choosing my first set of A and B \flat clarinets. Since then, for 50 years, I have played on Buffet clarinets and use an original B45 Vandoren mouthpiece and Vandoren reeds V12, No. 3-1/2.

I attended Hofstra University (then Hofstra College) at a time when it was a small college where the music department was



Naomi Drucker, Stanley Drucker

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Monochrome III recording session, January 2004 (l to r): Robert Yamins, Stanley Drucker, Dana Perna (producer), Mindy Dragovich, Peter Schickele (composer), Peter Weinberg, Naomi Drucker, Amy Shapiro, Mitchel Estrin, Jess Gross and Lawrence Sobol

housed in a quonset hut. I received a fine education there and took many courses with our famous Great Neck composer Elie Siegmeister, whose music is played all over the world.

New York City was a resource center for me, where I trained at the National Orchestra Association under conductor Leon Barzin, attended New York Philharmonic concerts and studied at the Manhattan studio of Leon Russianoff, the great clarinet teacher. That was where I met my future husband, Stanley Drucker, who joined the New York Philharmonic at age 19.

While I was still a student at Hofstra College, I won an audition and became the first clarinetist of the North Carolina Symphony. I was 21 years old, and at that time no orchestra had a full-year season, not even the New York Philharmonic. The North Carolina Symphony had an 18-week season starting in January, so I took a leave of absence for the spring and then returned to Hofstra for summer and fall semesters. Hofstra continued my scholarship, arranged for me to study privately with faculty to make up courses, and really helped me to achieve my goals of becoming a teacher, an orchestral player and a soloist.

For me, teaching is the most important work I do. For better or worse, we are all shaped by our teachers. I have been a member of the Music Department of Hofstra University since 1969. I love teaching, and have been teaching clarinet since I was 16 years old. When I was a new teacher, I taught only the clarinet, but now the clar-

inet is the "cover" to teach about loving music, communicating and interpreting the music, and bringing joy, humor, romance, comfort or peace to those who come to listen. It is a way to teach about personal goals, integrity, artistic honesty and self-discipline.

Music makes a difference in everyone's life. I am thrilled every time I introduce the Mozart *Clarinet Concerto* to a 13- or 14-year-old, for I know that Mozart and that *Concerto* will become a part of the fabric of that student's being. His or her life will never be the same for having practiced and strived to bring the beauty of that music through mind and body, from the black dots and lines on the white music paper, into living and breathing music. I never get over the wonder of it!

Stanley and I were married in 1956, and we began a life together that has enriched us and made us very happy. Every kind of music has filled our lives. Our daughter Rosanne and son Leon are both professional musicians. Their music making in the blues, country music, and rock-and-roll fields has given us great pride and pleasure. Leon, aka Lee Rocker, is a bass player and a founding member of the Stray Cats. Rosanne is a country music singer/songwriter.

My dad was very proud of me and Stanley, and he loved to hear us play together. He always joked and said when speaking about us, "he also plays," which leads me to a little anecdote that all our friends know, which took place when Stanley and I went on a tour of Japan many years ago: Stanley and I were playing a nationally

televised concert and Stanley was interviewed between pieces. To his great surprise, he was asked, "Who plays better, you or your wife?" He was able to answer, "Well, her father thinks she does."

In addition to my work with ACE, I am principal clarinetist of the New York Virtuosi Chamber Symphony, and extra clarinet when needed at the New York Philharmonic. I have toured and recorded with both orchestras.

In 1991, the Nassau Symphony and conductor Andrew Schenk commissioned our friend Meyer Kupferman to write a double clarinet concerto for Stanley and me. It was dedicated to the memory of Leon Russianoff, teacher of all three of us (Andrew Schenk was also a clarinetist), and premiered at Hofstra University. In 2000, Stanley, Meyer and I traveled to Prague to record and perform the concerto with the Czech National Symphony Orchestra, Paul Freeman conducting.

In 2002, Stanley and I performed the Krommer *Concerto for Two Clarinets and Orchestra*, Op. 32 with the Manhattan Philharmonic under the direction of Peter Tiboris, at Carnegie Hall. In 2003, we premiered *Fantasy for Two Clarinets and Orchestra*, written for us by Edward Thomas, and performed by the New York Virtuosi Chamber Orchestra, Kenneth Klein conducting, at Merkin Hall, New York City.

We have performed in concert together all over the world and have wonderful careers, which crisscross all the time.

Music is my life. I am a musician. I am very proud of that. I am truly blessed. All of my childhood dreams have come true. I wanted to be a soloist on the clarinet, I wanted to play with great orchestras, I wanted to be a teacher, I wanted a loving husband and children. Actually, much, much more has come to pass than I ever would have dreamed.

DISCOGRAPHY

AMERICAN CLARINET TREASURES. George Kleinsinger: *Quintet for Clarinet and Strings*; Elliott Carter: *Pastorale for Clarinet and Piano*; Virgil Thomson: *Five Portraits for Four Clarinets*; Douglas Moore: *Quintet for Clarinet and Strings*; Gary Schocker: *Sonata for Two Clarinets and Piano*. Elysium CD GRK 718. Naomi Drucker, clarinet, Blanche Abram, piano, Marilyn Sherman

Lehman, piano, Eriko Sato, violin, Lois Martin, viola, Chris Finckel, cello, Stanley Drucker, clarinet, Dennis Smylie, alto clarinet, Stephen Freeman, bass clarinet

Elie Siegmeister: *Prelude, Blues and Finale for Two Clarinets and Piano*. Gasparo CD GSS-2008. Naomi Drucker, clarinet, Stanley Drucker, clarinet, Blanche Abram, piano

Stanley Drucker and Naomi Drucker Play Meyer Kupferman. *Triple Play, Soundspells Fantasy; Quartet for Clarinet and Strings; Five Flings; Four Double Features*. Soundspells CD102. Naomi Drucker, clarinet, Stanley Drucker, clarinet, Blanche Abram, piano, Kazuko Hayami, piano, The Laurentian String Quartet

Woman in Darkness — Music for Theater, Cabaret and Concert Stage by Herbert A. Deutsch. 4Tay CD4012. Naomi Drucker, clarinet, Blanche Abram, piano and synthesizer, Deirdre Kingsbury, soprano, Chris Finckel, cello, Donald Larsen, percussion

Albert Tepper: Duos and Trios. *Trio Barocco; The Toy Flute; Suite for Clarinet and Bassoon; Sonata for Violin and*



Standing (l to r): Chris Finkel, cello; Deborah Wong, violin; Eriko Sato, violin; Lois Martin, viola; Naomi Drucker, clarinet; seated (l to r): Blanche Abram, piano; Marilyn Sherman Lehman, piano

Piano; Three Inventions on DBH; A Shakespeare Garland; Moorish Drone Dance. 4Tay CD4014. Naomi Drucker, clarinet, Blanche Abram, piano, Deirdre Kingsbury, mezzo soprano, Eriko Sato, violin, Lois Martin, viola, Chris Finckel, cello, Patricia Spencer, flute, Braden Toan, bassoon

The American Chamber Ensemble. Judith Land Zaimont: *From the Great Land for Mezzo, Clarinet and Piano*. Valley Weigl: *Songs of Remembrance for Mezzo, Clarinet and Piano*; Paul Hindemith: *Quartet for Clarinet, Violin, Cello and Piano*. Leonarda CD LE 329. Naomi Drucker, clarinet, Blanche Abram, piano, Deirdre Kingsbury, mezzo soprano, Timothy Baker, violin, Chris Finckel, cello

The Orchestral Music of Meyer Kupferman. Volume 14 — Double Concerto for Two Clarinets and Orchestra. Soundspells Productions CD133. Stanley & Naomi Drucker, clarinets, Czech National Symphony Orchestra, Paul Freeman, conductor

Music for Doubles. Franz Krommer: *Concerto for Two Clarinets and Orchestra*, Op. 35. Elysium GRK 714. Stanley Drucker, clarinet, Naomi Drucker, clarinet, Bohuslav Martinu Philharmonic, Peter Tiboris, conductor

Dana Richardson: *Sonata for Cello and Piano*. Dionysian LP DR101. Blanche Abram, piano, Chris Finckel, cello

Marga Richter: *Sonora for Two Clarinets and Piano*. Leonarda LPI 122. Naomi Drucker, clarinet, Stanley Drucker, clarinet, Blanche Abram, piano

New York Legends: Stanley Drucker. Elie Siegmeister: *Prelude, Blues and Finale for Two Clarinets and Piano*; Poulenc: *Sonata for Two Clarinets*. Cala CD CACD0509. Stanley Drucker, clarinet, Naomi Drucker, clarinet, Kazuko Hayami, piano

American Chamber Ensemble Plays Peter Schickele. *Quartet for Clarinet, Violin, Cello, Piano; Monochrome III for 9 Clarinets; Serenade for Three for Violin, Clarinet, Piano; Octet for Clarinet, Bassoon, French Horn, 2 Violins, Viola, Cello and Double Bass*. Elysium CD GRK 725. Naomi Drucker, clarinet, Blanche Abram and Marilyn Sherman Lehman, piano, Eriko Sato and Deborah Wong, violin, Lois Martin, viola, Chris Finckel, cello, Kurt Muroki, double bass, Braden Toan, bassoon, Eva Conti, French horn and The Clarinet Band — Stanley Drucker, Naomi Drucker, Mitchell Estrin, Lawrence Sobol, Robert Yamins, Peter Weinberg, Amy Shapiro, Mindy Dragovich and Jess Gross.

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