

From Frosini to Foss: A Half Century of Contemporary Music for the Accordion



The "K Trio stepped in the last minute and performed Concerto in E by Deiro, Scherzo by John Gart and Frosini's Olive Branches. They performed the following evening as well in a concert featuring Vyatcheslav Semionov.



Lukas Foss was not only a member of the panel discussion prior to the concert, but was also onhand to hear the premiere of his composition *Triologue*, performed by Airi Yoshioka on violin, Madeleine Shapiro on cello, and Robert McMahan on accordion.

melodica and vocal performances by Allyssa Lamb; arrangements for three accordions of *Olive Branches*, by Pietro Frosini, the finale of the *Concerto in E*, by Pietro Deiro, and *Scherzo*, by John Gart, all performed by the K Trio; *Sonatina*, by David Diamond, performed by Beverly Roberts Curnow; *Introduction, Cadenza, and Tarantella and Rhapsodie Espagnol*, by Eugene Ettore, performed by Rita Weinbuch Davidson; *Divertimento*, by Vyatcheslav Semionov, performed by the composer; *Triologue*, by Lukas Foss, and *Stille Szene*, by Wolfgang Rihm, both for violin, cello, and accordion, and both performed by Airi Yoshioka, Madeleine Shapiro, and myself; and my own *Mists and Mountains*, played by myself. The Franceschina, Diamond, and Foss works were all AAA commissions (the last being the most recent), and the Semionov selection was recently commissioned by past AAA president Faithe Deffner. *Triologue*, *Zen and the Art of the Foxtrot*, *Introduction, Cadenza, and Tarantella*, and *Divertimento* were given their world premieres this

evening and enthusiastically received by the audience.

Preceding the 7:30 concert was a panel discussion of several of the works on the program. The panelists were Lukas Foss, John Franceschina, Vyatcheslav Semionov, Rita Davidson, Micki Goodman, and myself. Needless to say, the composers discussed their works to be played in the concert. Rita Davidson talked about the late Eugene Ettore's heretofore unheard *Introduction, Cadenza, and Tarantella*, which was composed by this major accordionist/composer (and Ms Davidson's teacher) over three decades ago and resurrected by her from his musical estate. Dancer/choreographer Micki Goodman represented her husband, William Schimmel (who could not be present), in describing his new work on the program. A lively exchange of questions and answers



Vyatcheslav Semionov premiered his new piece, *Divertimento*. Prof. Semionov also performed in concert the following evening at the Weill Concert Hall in New York City.



Panel members included:

Rita Davidson, Micki Goodman (representing Bill Schimmel), Lukas Foss, Vyatcheslav Semionov, Robert McMahan and John Franceschina.

Micki Goodman also presented husband Bill Schimmel's new work on the program. *Zen and the Art of the Foxtrot* for voice, melodica and interactive video. Allyssa Lamb performed vocals and melodica.

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between panelists and audience followed each presentation.

Also preceding the concert was an expression of gratitude by Prof. Atlas to Guest of Honor Sandra Deiro Cattani, daughter of the late Pietro ("Lee") Deiro, Jr., who recently donated her father's papers to the CUNY Center for the Study of Free Reed Instruments; and a brief speech of appreciation by AAA President Linda Soley Reed to AAA Composers Commissioning Committee Chair Emeritus, and senior-most member of the AAA Governing Board, Elsie Bennett, for her six decades of service to the AAA and her outstanding work in persuading so many famous composers to write for the accordion. Flowers were presented to her from the stage. It was particularly exciting to have present in the same hall this grand dame of the accordion world and one of America's most famous composers, Lukas Foss, a long-time friend of Ms. Bennett, who has commissioned him twice to write works for the AAA over a twenty-nine-year span.

This was an especially good weekend for the accordion in New York City, for the next afternoon and evening, Prof. Semionov gave a workshop and special recital of his and other composers' works for the accordion at the Greenwich House School of Music. The program was shared with the K Trio, which performed several very entertaining works as well.

The next CUNY concert, which will take place on Friday evening, December 9, 2005, promises to be equally exciting. Most of the same artists from the March program will participate, plus accordionist Lenny Feldmann, William Schimmel, and the winner of the Carrozza Scholarship Award at the 2005 AAA Festival in Dearborn. Carmen Carrozza will also perform if he is available at that time. Already slated for the program are several AAA commissioned works: two jazzy pieces, *Sky Forrest*, for four accordions, by Henry Brant, and *Accordion Samba*, a "cross-over piece" for accordion, bassoon, cello, and scat singer, by Gary Friedman, plus *Rondo*, by Otto Luening, *Sonata Fantasia*, by Normand Lockwood, and *Improvisation, Ballade, and Dance*, by Elie Siegmeister. Other selections for the evening will be *Silenzio*, for violin, cello, and accordion, by noted Russian composer Sofia Gubaidulina, *Concerto Grunge*, for melodica, vocalist, accordion, and interactive video, by William Schimmel, various works by accordion pioneers Pietro Deiro, Pietro Frosini, Eugene Ettore, and others, and my own *Symbiosis*, for guitar and accordion (James Day, guitar). As always, a panel discussion of composers present will take place before the concert.

Registration fliers will be sent to AAA members as the date approaches. Why not brighten the final days of autumn by attending this truly unique evening

Elsie Bennett Retires as Chair of the AAA Composers' Commissioning Committee and is Appointed Chair Emeritus

By Robert Young McMahan

A bastion of the AAA and the longest resident member of its Governing Board, Elsie Bennett, recently announced her retirement from her half-century's distinguished service as Chair of the Composers Commissioning Committee, which she founded in 1953.

A native of Detroit, Ms. Bennett came to New York as a young bride in the mid 1940s. She had majored in music at Wayne University in her home state, but decided to finish her bachelor's degree requirements at Columbia University once she and her groom, the late Mortimer Bennett, settled into their Brooklyn home and future music studio. By 1945 she graduated from Wayne and soon thereafter pursued her master's degree at Columbia Teachers' College. There she was permitted to use the accordion as her major instrumental emphasis, provided she could find a good teacher. The teacher turned out to be the great Joseph Biviano. With that condition more than adequately

met, she set about fulfilling a second and far more challenging quest: finding original classical literature for the accordion. But there was little yet written for this still young instrument beyond a handful of ensemble works that included it in the instrumentation, such as in Virgil Thomson's unusual opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* and Paul Hindemith's *Kammermusik Nr. 1*. In the end, the College music department permitted her to play transcriptions of non-accordion works by masters of the past for her final qualifying recital.

Effective and pleasing though they can be, however, adaptations of piano, violin, and orchestral music from another time do not a new instrument's

