A Message from the Managing Director

Robin Creighton Ravazzini ’90
Virtuoso Program Managing Director

This winter, Virtuoso Program students are busy preparing for the Orchestra da Camera’s third trip to the National Orchestra Festival. The competition is sponsored by the American String Teachers Association. ASTA’s 11,500 members include educators, performers, string industry representatives, students, and string enthusiasts. Each year, they hold a national conference in a different city and invite middle school and high school orchestras from around the country to participate in the competition, held during the conference.

During the competition week, our students have the opportunity to attend conference activities and mingle with string professionals and fellow students who share their passion for music. They visit the huge exhibit hall where music stores and instrument makers allow students to try out their latest products and learn about new trends in the string industry. They also attend performances and master classes by renowned musicians and have a chance to hear other competing student orchestras perform.

The competition itself is a wonderful motivator, pressing the girls to focus on perfecting ensemble, technique and intonation, but the whole experience of being immersed in string music for a few days is truly life-changing.

While the Orchestra da Camera brought home Grand Champion trophies from both past competitions trips to Reno, Nevada and Albuquerque, New Mexico, the students brought home much more: a sense of being a part of a larger national string community, strong bonds with their fellow orchestra members and musical memories that will last a lifetime.

Be a part of the excitement!

You are invited to come and support the Orchestra da Camera at the National Orchestra Festival by attending their actual competition performance on Friday, February 19, 2010 at 2:00 p.m. It will take place in the Grand Ballroom at the Santa Clara Convention Center. Admission is free of charge and open to the public. This is the first time the competition will be held in the bay area and our students will love to have home-town fans in the audience. No need to reserve a seat. Just bring your friends and show up ready to hear a great performance!

Save the Date

Bon Voyage Concert
Presented by the Virtuoso Program Orchestra da Camera
George Thomson, conductor
Sunday, February 7, 2010
3:00pm
Carol Franc Buck Hall of the Arts
San Domenico School
Don’t miss the orchestra in their final home performance before traveling to compete in the 2010 National Orchestra Festival, sponsored by the American String Teachers Association

Online Giving
Making your annual gift to the Virtuoso Program Scholarship Fund is easier than ever! Just log on to www.sandomenico.org/giving and enter your donation information online. Then be sure to click over to the Virtuoso Program’s Sounds and News page to hear concert clips of recent performances.
With a very successful “Vivaldi” concert now behind us, we turn in earnest to our preparations for February’s National Orchestra Festival. This year we are bringing two contrasting works which will test the expressive range of our students to the fullest: the lush and somewhat romantic Ancient Airs and Dances of Ottorino Respighi, and the intense, harrowing Chamber Symphony of Dmitri Shostakovich, an arrangement for string orchestra of his eighth String Quartet.

Though composed only about three decades apart, they could almost be from two different worlds. Respighi’s 1931 “free transcription” of fragments of 17th-century lute music is a technicolor re-imagining of an innocent past that never was—a far cry from the “historically authentic” performances of early music that we take for granted today. Like most transcriptions it speaks less to the historical period of its source than to that of the transcriber: looking backward as a sort of antidote to the upheaval of the first world war and the ensuing vast social changes in Europe, yet maintaining a blissful ignorance of the gathering clouds on the horizon. Its gestures are romantic but its emotional stance is detached.

Shostakovich’s 1960 work, on the other hand, is a veritable study in the destruction and desolation brought about by war. Inspired in part (as the official story goes) by Shostakovich’s reaction to the ruins of a bombed-out Dresden after World War II, the work is by turns bleak, savage, ironic and bitter. Yet even at its darkest there is a hint of hope, of tenderness and repose. Shostakovich was a complex and conflicted man, and his music always admits of many different interpretations: this piece can also be read as a narrative of a different, inner struggle, filled with many quotations of his own works, and the obsessive use of a four-note musical “cipher” that stands for his name.

Tellingly, the students took to the Shostakovich right away. As has usually happened when we have given this piece to the Virtuoso Program, they play it through the very first time as if straight from the heart. The challenge is to harness all of that great, raw energy and channel it into one unified voice, with all the details in place. For the Respighi on the other hand, the process is something opposite: the sheer technical brilliance of the writing can easily be an end in itself, and the challenge for us in the next few months will be to learn to play this music from the heart. Mind and heart, and spirit—we work them all in the Virtuoso Program, not just those fingers!

Virtuoso Program graduate Makiko Harris ’07 recently reflected on her National Orchestra Festival experience:

“Competing in the 2005 National Orchestra Festival was one of the best memories I have of being in the Virtuoso Program. Preparing for the trip brought us all together not only as colleagues, but as friends and sort of a “musical family.” It was really a labor of love. Even more than having the grand prize as our goal, we wanted to show our absolute best in our first national competition, and we all worked together to get there.

I still play the violin in chamber groups here at Tufts University, but what I miss about the Virtuoso Program, which was epitomized by how we all were at the festival, is the camaraderie. As a junior in college, I still keep in touch with a lot of my fellow Virtuoso Program buddies I formed strong bonds with during the competition. And with this sentiment of family, I think we were all the better prepared to really stick together, work hard, and blow those judges out of the water!”

San Domenico Virtuoso Program Faculty & Staff

George W. Thomson, Music Director
Robin Creighton Ravazzini ’90, Virtuoso Program Managing Director
Susan Bates, Viola Teacher and Chamber Music Coach
Zaven Melikian, Violin Teacher and Chamber Music Coach
Sergei Ribatchenko, Cello Teacher and Chamber Music Coach
Miles Graber, piano accompanist
Rob DeNunzio, Music Conservatory Director

George Thomson, Virtuoso Program Music Director