A Message from the Managing Director

Robin Creighton Ravazzini ’90
Virtuoso Program Managing Director

Each year we strive to offer our students new and exciting experiences that challenge them to develop their musical skills and also expose them to various aspects of a professional music career. We couldn’t do this without the generosity of donors like you. By supporting the Virtuoso Program this year, you helped us provide this group of young musicians some wonderful experiences that helped enrich their musical knowledge. Thank you.

I hope you will enjoy reading about this year’s highlights, including our partnership with Bread & Roses, a local organization that brings live music to people living in institutions. When we initially contacted Bread & Roses to ask if our Virtuoso Program chamber groups might become regular performing volunteers, we knew that Bread & Roses’ audiences would enjoy hearing our students play, but another great outcome was how the experience inspired our students. In this issue of Overtures, Virtuoso Program musicians Maggie Zeng ’10 and Allie Simpson ’11 share a story about their Bread & Roses performance.

Also in this issue, George Thomson shares news of the Orchestra da Camera’s fantastic concert at the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco with guest artists from the San Francisco Symphony. We were thrilled to receive coverage by respected music critic Janos Gereben on the classical music website San Francisco Classical Voice www.sfcv.org, read by 20,000 Bay Area music lovers each week. He wrote a promotional article before the performance and a stellar review of the concert.

As the school year draws to an end and our students head off to music camps, science camps and summer jobs, they will take with them folders of music to practice in preparation for the 2009-2010 school year. I can promise it will be another great year for the Virtuoso Program, beginning with our traditional “Vivaldi at San Domenico” Benefit Concert on Sunday, October 18. Hope to see you there!

Bread & Roses

By Maggie Zeng ’10 and Allie Simpson ’11

Consider how lucky people would be if they could experience the joy of offering and receiving at the same time! Proudly, we have been allowed to experience this through our performances for the Bread and Roses organization. Bread and Roses is a charitable organization that brings musicians to play music for people living in institutions such as assisted living homes and hospitals, in other words, people who are not able to go to a music concert on their own.

For our Bread and Roses project, we bring chamber music to those who are unable to travel out of their facilities. Unlike a formal performance in a concert hall, we play in the living rooms and lounges of these facilities, which makes for a more personal and homely atmosphere not only because we sit closer to the audience but also because there is no pressure for perfection but only pure appreciation from the audience. Last time, when our trio performed the Serenade by Dohnanyi at the Tamalpais Creek Assisted Living Center in Novato, we saw a woman sitting in the front row, who was so full of joy and satisfaction that she was nodding with the melody and gasping with excitement at all the best parts of the music. After the performance, we mingled with the audience to thank them for listening. Their gratitude touched our hearts. They emphatically told us how much talent we all possess as they held our hands. We knew that true happiness as a performer only comes when a person wholeheartedly enjoys what we had labored to create as artists. The Bread and Roses organization offers us a unique opportunity to reach out to the community with our music, which is an experience that will last forever in our lives.

Photo by Peter Merts, courtesy of Bread & Roses
From the Podium
George Thomson, Virtuoso Program Music Director

One of the more pleasant requirements of my work with the Virtuoso Program is the need always to “dream big” and come up with new and exciting ways to challenge our students. Every year’s class is different, and I am always trying to find ways to highlight their particular strengths. This season, we dreamt exceptionally “big” and came up with a remarkable benefit concert this past March, joining forces with musicians from the San Francisco Symphony and other area orchestras in a performance of Mendelssohn, Mahler and Brahms.

Between the dreaming and the doing came months of intense preparation, of course, and innumerable logistical challenges. Yet, more than any other event we’ve tried, this one really could only take shape on the very day of the concert. The professional players with whom we collaborated on the Mahler Adagietto and the Brahms Double Concerto are among the busiest people around; many of them had already played one concert at Davies Symphony Hall that same afternoon! Their time and our budget could not allow for more than one brief rehearsal with all the musicians together. It all came down to one very intense hour, and in that hour of collaboration our students learned an incredible amount.

There was no panic (except perhaps on my part, having to drive the truck full of equipment from San Domenico to Kanbar Hall’s somewhat petite loading dock, but that is another story. What we do for art...); everyone was prepared. The pros knew this repertoire intimately, and our own students had been practicing it for months. The Mendelssohn Octet movements which opened the concert were performed by the students only; we had some time to rehearse them onstage as the guest musicians were arriving. Several peered in from backstage as we worked, and it was a particular pleasure to see the looks of impressed surprise on their faces.

Then it was time to rehearse the Brahms. At first the students were a bit surprised by the great solidity of sound produced by the Symphony players; the union of youthful exuberance and professional steadiness took a few minutes to achieve. More than once did I trade knowing smiles with the guest woodwind players as we accommodated each other and our two spectacular student soloists. All the Virtuoso Program students were inspired by this intense level of concentration, at which tiny adjustments are made constantly, and little discrepancies, when they do happen, happen only once. The actual performance afforded our students to reach that level themselves. It was an experience not to be forgotten by our young players, and one that will have a lasting impact on their own playing as we move forward into another year of big dreams.

Excerpt from Orchestra da Camera
Concert Review
March 29, 2009
Jewish Community Center of San Francisco

“...San Domenico’s student musicians not only performed the program-opening movements from the Mendelssohn Octet, arranged for string orchestra, in a fluent, spirited manner, their virtuosity in the Presto was dazzling. No wonder Thomson’s school project, under which they are being trained, is called the Virtuoso Program. The principal cellist was Mariko Wyrick, one of the evening’s featured soloists, here just a member of the band. No star conceits among these young ones.

Then came the Adagietto from Mahler’s Fifth Symphony … and it was solid, soulful, straightforward — conveying deep feelings without sentimentality.

The Brahms Double Concerto was simply the best. How Thomson managed to hold the big Allegro together, make the Andante sing, and have the closing Vivace non troppo exactly right — with a teenage/ad-hoc hybrid orchestra, and two student soloists — is a rhetorical question; a possible general answer: talent and hard work.

Violinist Mayumi Wyrick and the above-mentioned cellist Mariko Wyrick performed on a high professional level, their age showing — delightfully — only in their expressions of excitement and enjoyment. Both have “big sounds” and an admirable degree of precision and innate musicality. The sisters’ parents, cellist Peter Wyrick and violinist Amy Hiraga, played with the orchestra, and must have experienced total bliss in witnessing the triumph of their prodigious progeny at such close quarters and “in concert.”

In the audience was Faith France, who started and built the San Domenico Virtuoso Program over the years, until her retirement five years ago, at age 82. Like the Wyricks, she too must have felt overflowing parental pride and satisfaction.”

Janos Gereben
San Francisco Classical Voice
www.sfcv.org

San Domenico Virtuoso Program Faculty & Staff
George Thomson, Music Director
Robin Creighton Ravazzini ’90, Managing Director
Zaven Melikian, Violin Teacher and Chamber Music Coach
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Sergei Ribitchenko, Cello Teacher and Chamber Music Coach
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Rob DeNunzio, Music Conservatory Director