

BLAIR

Quarter Note

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

Key(board) to Success

Blair blends collegiate and
precollegiate piano instruction

page 3

SPRING 2008

Cover photo by John Russell

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From the *Dean*



The importance of teaching in our society can hardly be overstated. Quite apart from its immediate effects on our students, teaching reaches far beyond those students to the future. Indeed, it is our primary means of affecting the future.

I was reminded of this recently at my high school reunion. Our ninth-grade English teacher, whom none of us had seen in 40 years, attended. We realized, individually and as a group, that he had had a great influence on all of us. One former student said that she had learned how to write a cogent paper in his class and that had served her well all her life. Three other students, recalling reading *Macbeth* in his class, spontaneously recited the “tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow” soliloquy, which they had retained in their memories for four

decades. This was a powerful and joyous testimony to the power of teaching. Forty years later, these students remembered that English class as a highlight of their lives.

Since the inception of the Blair School in 1964, the combined arts of teaching and performance have been extraordinarily intertwined. Faculty members in performance instruction are hired according to the quality of *both* their teaching and their playing or singing. We are fortunate to have some of the nation’s leading artist-teachers at the Blair School, at both the precollege and collegiate levels.

Recently I received an email from Preetha Narayanan, who graduated from the Blair School in 2006. During the past year she has been in India on a Fulbright grant, exploring connections between South Indian classical music and Western art music. Preetha had just returned to visit Blair, and this is part of what she wrote:

I just wanted to thank you and all the faculty for making our undergraduate education so enriching. I am grateful to be a Blair alumna, to have had the attention, support and encouragement of the faculty. . . . It was inspiring to be back, and I definitely want to stay in touch . . . and also be a part of the changes and programs that may take shape at Blair in the future.

I don’t believe any dean or faculty member of any school of music could receive a more gratifying affirmation of the power of teaching.

Mark Wait

A handwritten signature of Mark Wait in dark ink.

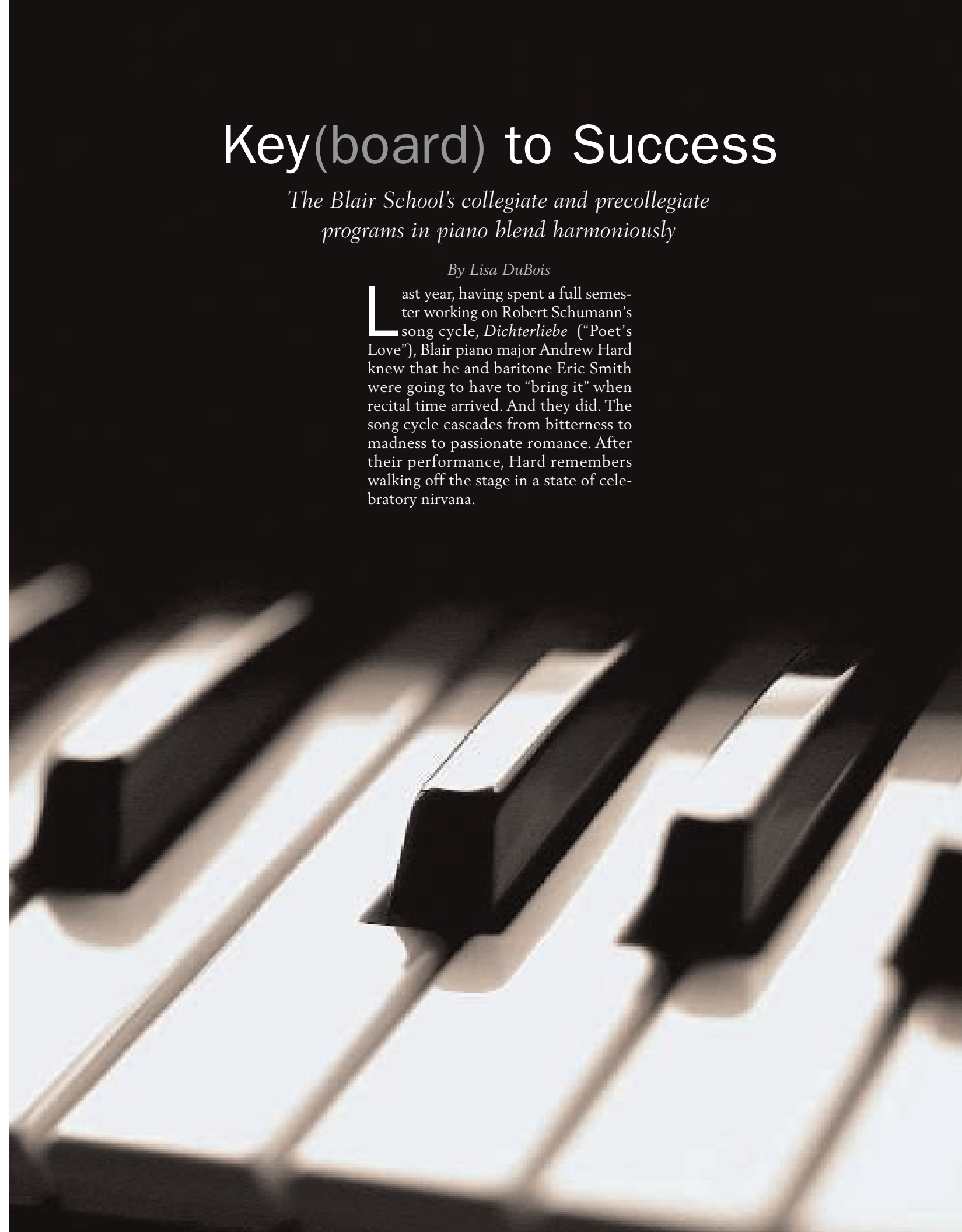
Dean

Key(board) to Success

The Blair School's collegiate and precollegiate programs in piano blend harmoniously

By Lisa DuBois

Last year, having spent a full semester working on Robert Schumann’s song cycle, *Dichterliebe* (“Poet’s Love”), Blair piano major Andrew Hard knew that he and baritone Eric Smith were going to have to “bring it” when recital time arrived. And they did. The song cycle cascades from bitterness to madness to passionate romance. After their performance, Hard remembers walking off the stage in a state of celebratory nirvana.



“The way we performed it was so emotional and the connection between the soloist and the pianist seemed to be on another level than it had been in rehearsals,” he recalls. “That was very gratifying. It’s about letting your guard down and feeling the emotions of the piece and letting them wash over you. It’s more than merely listening and reacting to the other part, it’s about



feeling the music inside you.”

Now a senior, double-majoring in piano and economics, Hard is devoting this semester to perfecting the Brahms Sonata in E-Flat Major, Op.120, No. 2, for piano and viola. The work is equally challenging, but in a different way. He is cautiously optimistic about experiencing that same excitement after this semester’s recital, as well.

For students to have reached such a rare emotional connection to the music is the quintessential reward for Melissa Rose, associate professor of piano, and Roland Schneller, Chancellor’s Professor of Piano and senior artist teacher of piano, who serve as co-chairs of the keyboard department at the Blair School of Music.

Through songs and works of chamber music, Rose says, “We offer our students lots of opportunities for accompaniment.” That is putting it mildly. Keyboard majors are required to take eight semesters in some sort of ensemble. The professors help the students form these ensembles, be it a piano, cello and violin trio, for example, or a song cycle for pianist and singer, or a duo for two

pianos, or a quartet for piano, violin, viola and cello. Recently, Rose’s students found a piece by Carl Reinecke for piano, oboe and horn and put together an unusual trio. “This group is now having a great time playing chamber music together,” she says.

Because Blair’s keyboard department is relatively small—with 16 piano majors and 20-some students who list piano as either a second major or as a minor—it is remarkably agile. The faculty makes an effort to adjust to the needs and skills of the students during any given semester. “One of the advantages of being a small music department is that we can facilitate a lot of crossover between string players, singers and pianists,” Schneller says. “We can

put together groups very quickly.”

To get into the keyboard program, prospective students audition over weekends in January and February. Although they might be accepted into Blair based on their talent, they still must meet the academic requirements to be accepted into the university at large. Not surprisingly, as the university has raised the bar for admission, Blair students have stepped up to the challenge, both academically and musically. Many arrive on campus with resumes loaded not only with prestigious music awards, but also with AP and honors courses in non-music subjects.

Rose says, “The prospective students we’re seeing are outstanding. They’re also auditioning and applying to schools like Northwestern, Oberlin and Rice. Most of our students want both a strong school of music and a strong academic environment. So we are attracting academically strong students who also want to pursue music, sometimes as a double major with pre-med, math or pre-law.” In addition, many musically talented Vanderbilt students choose to take piano as an elective, but are studying to major in subjects within the school of Arts & Sciences, Engineering or Peabody.

The college program for keyboard majors is very rigorous and can be a tough adjustment for freshmen, who come from high schools where they’re used to taking music class only once or twice a week.

“When you’re a freshman at Blair, you’re here all day, every day,” says senior Hard. “You have your theory, ear training and history classes in the mornings and in the afternoons twice a week you take a keyboard harmony class with Professor Krieger. Plus you have to find time to practice.”

Hard says that although he has always loved the performance side of playing the piano, it took him a while to “get into the groove” of having four music classes in one day. Studying under Professor Craig Nies, he was allowed to choose his own repertoire, which he

thoroughly enjoyed.

“The only requirements are that you have to, in the course of your career at Blair, select pieces from every realm of the chronological span,” he says. “So you have to play some Bach, Mozart, modern impressionists, Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt. But everybody loves doing that, so there’s no problem there.”

Piano students have the opportunity to perform solo repertoire in the annual Vanderbilt Orchestra and Curb Youth Symphony concerto competitions and collegiate Student Showcase auditions. They also enjoy performing in master classes given by guest artists—in January the piano department welcomed Garrick Ohlsson while he was in town performing with the Nashville Symphony.

Also, because Blair is not a conservatory, undergraduates study with primary faculty members from the very beginning of their college experience. This is an advantage, Schneller says, because “in many major universities, the music faculty is mostly interested in their graduate students, and the undergraduates can fall through the cracks.”

Precollege Protégés

Blair’s renowned precollege music program includes children from ages five to eighteen, and adults taking private lessons. Professor Schneller runs the precollege arm of the keyboard department. Of the current 138 precollege piano students at Blair, 54 are on some kind of scholarship, either merit or need-based. The precollege program is modeled after the college program, in that students take a graded and critiqued performance exam at the end of each semester.

Schneller adds that as the school has grown in the 44 years since he’s been teaching at Blair, he has seen a corresponding rise in the skill level of his students. “We are seeing 12- and 13-year olds who are able to do things musically that are simply extraordinary,” he says. “This year, we were able to offer 15 Myra Jackson Blair full-tuition piano

scholarships to precollege students. They take classes in music theory, music history and chamber music or accompanying. If they’re interested, they may also take composition and write their own pieces. And we’ve had many of our scholarship students go on to become outstanding professional musicians.”

Pedagogy is another important component of the keyboard major’s life, and it is here that the collegiate and precollege keyboard programs cross paths. For academic credit and under the supervision of Karen Ann Krieger, associate professor of piano and piano pedagogy, Blair students teach those children who are on the wait-list for the precollege program. The younger the child, the more they are encouraged to sign up for group lessons. For many children, these lessons are their first exposure to the piano.

Rose says, “Group lessons are a fun way to learn. The teachers will do rhythm activities and ear-training activities, which are wonderful skills for young pianists to have. Things have come a long way. In the old days, it was much more pedantic. You did your scales and you played your piece.”

Although Hard thoroughly enjoyed his one-on-one teaching assignment, and even continued teaching his student for a second semester, he found that the group lessons, taught in tandem with another student, forced him to use a side of his brain he’d never activated before.

“Rather than having a bunch of kids running around while another kid took his turn plunking on the piano, you had to create activities and games that incorporated musical concepts that they were learning and that got them involved

and actively participating,” he says. “For seven- and eight-year olds, it can be tough to get them to hang in there for more than 2 minutes. It was a challenge. We had to alternate. One teacher would teach one segment and the other teacher would teach the other segment. The key was always to keep the kids moving around to different spots. If you kept them in the same spot for too long, you’d lose them.”



The intention is for these precollege youngsters to view piano lessons as fun, rather than as a necessary evil. The hope is that someday they, too, will experience the resonant joy derived from giving a beautiful performance of Schumann, Brahms, Beethoven, Mozart, Chopin, Liszt—or maybe just from the simple act of rippling their fingers across a keyboard.

THE ART OF ACCOMPANIMENT

To many musicians, the piano accompanist is the equivalent of a second-string player, a backup to the real star. In fact, this couldn't be further from the truth. Accompanying actually provides the definitive service to musicianship; it is an art form unto itself.

Daphne Nicari is among the cadre of accompanists who lend their talents to the Blair School of Music on a regular basis. For the past eight years, Nicari has

ing rehearsals. The accompanist's challenge is to follow the conductor's directions whether or not he's in attendance.

Along with opera rehearsals, Nicari also plays the orchestral reductions for students participating in concerto competitions. That, too, is its own animal. "You're trying to imitate what an orchestra would do, to be the oboe, the strings or the horns. There's a lot of tremolo and rumbling to make the piano sound like a full orchestra," Nicari explains. "Playing orchestral reductions requires a completely different technique than playing music specifically composed for piano and singer."

Much of her work at Blair entails working with students on ensemble pieces in preparation for a recital. Nicari begins by sitting down with the singer and sight-reading the selected piece so they both share a feeling for its content and direction. After the singer has practiced on his/her own for a period of time, Nicari

then begins discussing phrasing, tempo and breathing. An accompanist must give a singer time to breathe.

Nicari says, "From there we'll work on the shape of phrasing and word emphasis. Then after we've finished rehearsing, I'll tell them what consonants and vowels I couldn't understand, where we need to work on tempo—how fast and how loud. We'll discuss whether we've hit the mark stylistically. If it's a romantic song, there will be a lot of give and take in the tempo."

In other words, the accompanist is an active partner, not a sideline participant, in a musical performance. The skills of an accompanist are deemed so impor-

tant that all Blair keyboard majors take accompanying classes, during which they receive feedback and advice as they perform with an instrumentalist or vocalist.

Nicari says that the beauty of accompaniment is that it is the consummate continuing education. "I wish more students wanted to do accompanying," she admits. "From the time I left college, I learned more about musical ideas and interpretations from my experience accompanying other musicians and singers than I ever learned as a soloist."

— Lisa A. DuBois

"Tell Me if You've Heard This One..."

**Saturday, March 15, 2008
8:00 p.m.
Ingram Recital Hall
Sponsored by the Martin Foundation**

On March 15, the Blair School of Music keyboard faculty will present a concert of lesser known gems from the piano repertoire. No old standbys. No familiar chestnuts. Instead, they will focus on nuggets from such relative unknowns as French composer Lily Boulanger and Spanish composer Frederick Mompou. In addition, they will play more obscure pieces from the canons of classical superstars like Brahms and Mendelssohn. Keyboard department co-chair Melissa Rose wants this concert to match the success of last year's offering, to Eight Hands in Sixty. We were flabbergasted when so many people poured in that we had to delay the concert by 20 minutes to bring in extra chairs, she says. We even had people sitting on the stage.



Accompanist Daphne Nicari with Blair junior Amy O'Brien.

Bach to Bach

By Ray Waddle

ALONE ON A STAGE with his violin, Christian Teal embarked last year on an unusual evening of communion with a Nashville audience, conjuring the spirit of a composer who looms for 21st century listeners as both familiar and distant, accessible and intimidating.



JS. Bach (1685-1750) has lately surged as a subject for public performance at Blair. Two faculty members, Teal and Craig Nies, are each tackling the Baroque master's massive, cornerstone works for their respective instruments—and reintroducing restless audiences to an emotional world that still helps define Western civilization.

Teal is undertaking Bach's six sonatas and partitas for solo violin at downtown Nashville's Christ Church Cathedral. He performed half the set in September 2007 during a "Sacred Space for the City Arts" concert and will complete the cycle there later this year.

"It's a different psychological experience being all alone on stage," says Teal, the Joseph Joachim Professor of Violin and longtime member of the Blair Quartet.

"But I had a nice reaction from the audience. I feel more connected with the audience as I go. The further I went, the more they were on my side. It's stimulating to attempt something and not fall on my face!"

Nies, meanwhile, is working through the entire *Well-Tempered Clavier* on piano, one concert at a time—a marathon collection of preludes and fugues that twice covers all major and minor keys, a total of 48 compositions in two books. Nies

will perform six pieces at a time in eight concerts, coupling the Bach with works of other composers at each outing. He commenced in 2007 with two concerts, and plans to finish up by 2010.

"I'm in no rush—I'm enjoying it," says Nies, associate professor of piano.

"My appreciation of Bach's emotional and technical variety, along with many of his harmonic progressions, has increased with this series. I had a similar reaction while working on and performing the

"the real beauty of Bach's music is it always has more to tell you than you've yet heard. Do not expect to get it all at once."

—Carl Smith
senior lecturer of theory and
composition, organ and harpsichord

complete Chopin, Debussy, and Rachmaninoff preludes (24 each), which relate in a variety of keys, tempi, and character. You certainly become more aware of certain tendencies each composer has regarding harmonic language, technical demands and melodic gestures."

Musicians seem universally to revere Bach, but a lay reputation lingers that he

can be less engaging in the concert hall, less emotionally knowable, than his more flamboyant successors in music history. In the popular mind, perhaps, Bach sits on a pedestal, but he puzzles too, since he doesn't frolic in public memory as a vivid or mischievous personality.

"The pedestal phenomenon is a problem," says Blair faculty member Carl Smith, senior lecturer of theory and composition, organ and harpsichord.

"*The Well-Tempered Clavier*, for instance, requires engagement. It's intellectual work. People don't usually want to work to listen to music. ... But the real beauty of Bach's music is it always has more to tell you than you've yet heard. Do not expect to get it all at once. The fact that you can't is the beauty of it. Leave yourself open to being seduced by the music."

In a media-celebrity culture where composers are mythologized by movies (Mozart), or revealed in their notebooks (Beethoven), or enshrined in their obsessive political tracts (Wagner), Bach by contrast presents a shy monument who hails from an ever-receding 18th century world.

He doesn't come bursting out of thick volumes of correspondence (he didn't have time or inclination to write scads of letters and diaries; his was not an age of rampant self-promotion). Painted por-

traits suggest a benign, avuncular presence though bearing flashes of severity and ambition, too. Visitors remembered him as hospitable, modest, neighborly, combative at work but also a straight-arrow man of God who famously fathered 20 children (10 survived to adulthood, four became composers). Compared to his contemporary Handel, Bach boasted no far-flung traveling schedule. He spent his work life in the German provinces, making a name for himself as teacher, organist, instrument consultant, a pious Protestant composer with a strong work ethic in a busy career. He was no turbulent revolutionary. His genius was not to invent a convulsively new musical language but to improve—even perfect—the Baroque styles of his time. That especially applies to his northern European love of fugue, which for Bach seemed itself to be a way of thinking and feeling, a kind of play, perhaps an act of prayer.

"He took what existed to a level beyond what anyone could have imagined," says Smith, who last year at Blair performed devotional music on the harpsichord by Bach and his circle.

"His mature music is music from another world, not just another time."

Though a man of his time in crucial ways, Bach long ago entered the subconscious of Western music, as every critic has noted. The prodigious fugal inventiveness, the technical dexterity, the moody depths of his solo pieces and choral works—all have inspired composers and performers from Mozart to Stravinsky

to the next wave of interpreters.

"In speaking with many pianists, I found that Bach is either their favorite composer or one of their favorite composers even if they don't perform his music in public nearly as often as other composers," Nies says.



Blair professors Craig Nies (piano) and Chris Teal (violin) are tackling J.S. Bach's cornerstone works in separate concert series.

Both Teal and Nies speak of the startlingly wide spectrum of feeling they find in their encounters with Bach. The result is what the German language calls *gemüts-ergötzung*, or refreshment of the spirit.

"With 48 preludes and fugues—96 very different pieces in all 24 major and minor

keys—there has to be something for everyone," Nies says, referring to the *Well-Tempered Clavier*.

"Bach can be every bit as dramatic, lyrical, joyful and gentle as the other great composers for keyboard that followed."

In the case of the violin sonatas and partitas, where Bach sometimes insists on producing four different chords simultaneously from the instrument, Teal says: "What I find in the music is inspirational content, even spiritual content. It's amazing to hear the beautiful and sometimes bewildering sounds he gets out of the violin."

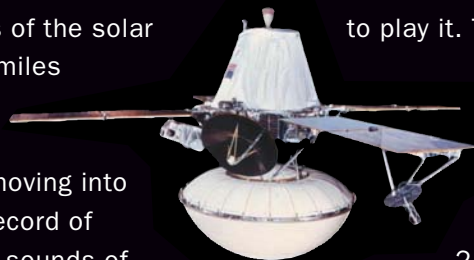
On the keyboard side, debate has dogged the *Well-Tempered Clavier* for generations. Was it designed for private practice or public performance? For harpsichord or piano? Did Bach create it in order to make an argument for a new philosophy of tuning or for the greater glory of God and art? In performance, though, these perennial questions fall away. The willing listener begins a

journey of astonishment.

"Bach started out to astonish himself by what he would discover," Smith says.

"Hearing the music, we enter his mind, and we become astonished at what he could conceive."

Somewhere near the edges of the solar system, nearly 10 billion miles from earth, the NASA Viking I orbital probe, which was launched 30 years ago, is moving into deep space, carrying a golden record of earth music—90 minutes of the sounds of humanity, in case an extraterrestrial finds a way



to play it. The record includes a Navajo chant, bagpipes from Azerbaijan, and Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode," but only Bach rates three selections—including the Prelude and Fugue in C from the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book 2, and the "Gavotte en rondeaux" from the Partita in E major for Violin.

A Partial List of Spring 2008 Series' Concerts

Here is an “at-a-glance” overview of some of the featured series presentations for spring 2008:

THE SIGNATURE SERIES—

Musical programs by Blair’s celebrated faculty ensembles and soloists, representing each of the school’s performance disciplines over the course of the year.

MARCH 15—Tell Me if You’ve

Heard This One! - Little known gems of the piano repertoire performed by the Blair faculty. Sponsored by The Martin Foundation.

MARCH 28—The Blair String Quartet

Spring Concert - Works by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Shostakovich and Tchaikovsky. Sponsored by Delphine and Ken Roberts in memory of David K. Wilson.

APRIL 4—The BMI Composer in Residence

Concert - For more than a decade, an artist residency program culminating in a concert featuring works by the visiting composers. This spring, Blair welcomes Pulitzer Prize winners Yehudi Wyner and Judith Slatin.

APRIL 5—The Blair Student Showcase - Performances by some of Blair’s best and brightest collegiate students.

APRIL 12—The Appalachian Celebration Returns -

Celebrating the “Pa’s Fiddle” CD project—music from Laura Ingalls Wilder’s Little House on the Prairie series. This event is co-sponsored by Vanderbilt University’s Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities in celebration of its 20th anniversary and Gaylord Entertainment.

THE NIGHTCAP SERIES—Music education made fun and accessible with one-hour music programs introduced by distinguished Vanderbilt lecturers - complete with complimentary coffee and desserts before each concert.

MARCH 17—An Evening of Cello with Felix Wang and the Student Cellists of Vanderbilt, Pre-Concert Talk with Helena Simonett

APRIL 3—The Songs of Jake Heggie with Mezzo Soprano Gayle Shay and Friends, Pre-Concert Talk with Joy Calico

THE GLOBAL MUSIC SERIES—

Contemporary artists from around Nashville and around the world, now in its second year - and now presented free of charge!

FEBRUARY 28—THE DUST POETS - From the Great Plains of Canada, this folk/rock/Cajun band injects their original songs with humor, irony and lots of charm

MARCH 14—PETER COOPER, JEN GUNDERMAN AND FRIENDS - Blair’s own faculty members and highly respected rock/folk musicians, bring a host of guest artists to share the stage - sure to be a star-studded event

NEW FOR 2008 AND BEYOND: THE BLAIR COMMISSIONS SERIES

New Music for the 21st Century

Funded by a gift from the James Stephen Turner Family Foundation, the Blair School of Music proudly presents the first of a series of world premieres of commissioned works by important contemporary composers.

April 14, 2008

Leslie Norton, Horn, with Carolyn Huebl, Violin, and Mark Wait, Piano, present the world premiere of a new work for horn trio by Lowell Liebermann.

Lowell Liebermann has seen his works performed internationally by orchestras such as the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, the St. Louis Symphony, the Cincinnati Orchestra and the Baltimore Symphony among others. Artists who have performed his works include James Galway, Mstislav Rostropovich, James Levine, Leonard Slatkin, Kenneth Schermerhorn and Joshua Bell. His Second Piano Concerto was premiered by the National Symphony with Stephen Hough, and his Flute Concerto was commissioned by James Galway and premiered by him with the St. Louis Symphony and Leonard Slatkin. Mr. Galway also performed the work with the Metropolitan Orchestra and James Levine at Carnegie Hall.

ALMOST ALL BLAIR FACULTY AND STUDENT CONCERTS ARE FREE OF CHARGE - and open to all audiences. NO TICKETS ARE NEEDED.

DATES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. Visit the Web site www.vanderbilt.edu/blair and click on “calendar of events” to get a complete up-to-date month-by-month listing of events.

Born to Sing

Blair program gives kids a voice

By Angela Fox



When the Blair Children's Chorus Program was established in 1986, its guiding principle was that "all children are musical and all children need to make music." Over 20 years and thousands of young voices later that belief resonates more strongly than ever.

The program is still classically based, with a focus on healthy vocal production, music reading skills and performance. The musical repertoire remains at a high level, encompassing works from around the world and all time periods. And the performance standards and venues are as sophisticated as those

of many adult ensembles. There are six groups ranging in age from 6 to 18 years.

"I believe in education through performance," artistic director Hazel Somerville says. "One of the things I want to do even more of with the young people in our programs is have them be a part of professional music making." Luckily, more and more professional groups are also interested in finding ways to include children in their concerts. In November 2007, for example, the Blair Concert Choir was invited to perform with the Boston Camerata at St. George's Episcopal Church in Nashville and then traveled to Knoxville to perform again with the Camer-

ata at the University of Tennessee.

The choir, comprised of 30 young women of junior and senior high school age, was part of a program of music from the Middle Ages called "Abbey of Love." The Blair choir sang songs performed by troubadours from the 13th and 15th centuries. It's the type of music Somerville loves as much for its broader educational value as for its musical beauty. "When we worked on the music, I also talked about what was happening in society at that time," she says. "It was an era of such dynamic social and cultural change, and I wanted to get that across to the girls."

That connection between music, society and culture is part of the training for even the youngest voices at Blair. "Music touches the social and emotional lives of children and opens a doorway to other places, times and cultures," agrees Tiffany Fuller, director of the Blair Preparatory Chorus for boys and girls, grades 1-3. "When kids get into singing at this age, you hook them before that doorway closes so they are more open to multicultural experiences all their lives."

Fuller hooks her chorus members on music through interactive activities like using a human-sized musical staff on the floor. "The children get to move bean bags and big plates around to learn about notes and musical composition," Fuller says. "Most adults are surprised at how much children can grasp—even kids as young as age 5 and 6 get the concept of 16th notes and sight singing."

Girls in grades three and above are also introduced to vocal fundamentals in the Young Singers of Blair. No previous choral experience is necessary for this beginning choir that stresses singing basics as well as music reading. "Most of these girls have some singing experience with school or church, but that's not required," says Coni Guerin, director of the ensemble. "I look for girls who can match pitch and who really want to sing and be a part of a group." As part of Guerin's group,

girls engage in exercises that use all their senses in the process of making music and apply the skills acquired to classical compositions. "We do music from all eras and sing in German, Latin and English," says Guerin. The Young Singers of Blair presents two to three concerts a year at Blair and at retirement homes and other community venues around Nashville.

Boys find a voice at Blair, too. The Nashville Boychoir at Blair, also under Somerville's direction, is comprised of boys, grades three and up, with unchanged voices. There is also a group for changing voices called Young Men's Chorus. Besides helping these boys explore their vocal tal-

ents and learn to read music together, Somerville also looks for performance opportunities in collaboration with other arts groups and professional ensembles at Blair and in the community. In October the Boychoir sang with the Winchester Cathedral Boys Choir. The Blair singers joined the famed English choir for Handel's "Let Their Celestial Concerts All Unite" as part of a full concert presented by the Winchester ensemble at St. George's Episcopal Church in Nashville. The church has hosted well-known boys' choirs from around the world for the past three years.



The Nashville Boychoir at Blair performed with the Winchester Cathedral Boys Choir in October in Nashville.

Two members of the Boychoir also joined the Nashville Symphony and Chorus in December at Schermerhorn Hall. "We prepared Ty Jackson and Jake Moore for the audition, and we were thrilled when both boys were chosen," Somerville says. Jackson, age 12, sang with the symphony chorus on "A Dylan Thomas Trilogy," by John Corigliano, for two performances and also was part of the recording of the concert to be released on the Naxos classical music label. Moore, age 11, sang at another performance and was understudy for the recording. The Boychoir also joined with members of the Blair Chorister Girls (ages 10-13) and the Blair Concert Choir to create a 50-voice ensemble that performed a piece by Prokofiev with the Nashville Symphony in December as part of the Pied Piper Concert Series for young audiences.

Summer tours are an important part of the Blair precollege choir program. "The Concert Choir tours somewhere in the U.S. every summer," says Somerville. "Then every third year, we travel outside the country." The Concert Choir toured and performed in Ireland last year and will travel to Eugene, Ore., in June to sing at the prestigious Oregon Bach Festival.

Somerville has expanded the summer tours to include the boys groups and younger girls ensembles as well. The Boychoir traveled to Dresden, Leipzig and Magdeburg, Germany, to perform last year and performs in Orlando, Fla., in May. The Blair Choristers performed with the St. Louis Children's Chorus in Missouri and will travel to Indianapolis later this year.

Young singers come to Blair from all over the Middle Tennessee area, some commuting from as far away as Memphis. Many of Blair Children's Chorus graduates have earned scholarships in music at some of the nation's top universities. But whether they pursue music or not, all graduates earn a lifetime of pleasure that comes from finding one's voice. "Everyone can sing—from the time a child can make a noise to when he or she becomes an adult," says Somerville. "That's the great thing about singing. You can enjoy it for the rest of your life."

A Simple Equation

Dawson Gray makes the connection between math and music

By Angela Fox

In May 2006, Dawson Gray graduated from Vanderbilt University with a double major in piano performance and mathematics. Currently pursuing a master's degree in education at Vanderbilt's Peabody College, his major focus is secondary education with an emphasis on math. After Gray graduates in May 2008 he will pursue a career as a math teacher on the high school level.

For Gray, math and music have always added up. "I came to Vanderbilt in order to pursue both interests," Gray says. "Because I've always been drawn to music and math, that ruled out any kind of conservatory." Gray started piano study at age five and by age nine was studying with Roland Schneller in Blair's precollegiate program. At the same time Gray was falling in love with musical notes, he was getting hooked on mathematical numbers. "I always had this thing for numbers, and I realized early in school that I had a real aptitude for it."

According to Craig Nies, Gray's piano teacher as an undergraduate, it's not uncommon for music students to be accomplished in both music and math or science. "The ability to learn a new piece of music quickly along with the ability to memorize a solo piece in a short period of time—even one that is quite complex—is something I have seen more often in students who do well in their math and science courses," says Nies.

Gray takes the connection a step further. "I find music unbelievably mathematical," he says. "In fact, I thought my

theory courses at Blair were math classes or at least I felt I was using math skills."

During the summer and fall of 2007, Gray helped 7th and 8th grade students make the math-music connection in a class at both the Vanderbilt Summer Academy (VSA) and the Weekend Academy at Vanderbilt University (WAVU), each programmed by Vanderbilt Programs for Talented Youth. Students in both the summer and fall class explored matrices, serialism, tuning systems, compositional techniques and the Fibonacci sequence, as well as other topics, and listened to classical, jazz and rock music.

In both sessions, Gray also used John Cage's controversial composition 4'33" which contains four minutes and 33 seconds of silence as part of the math and music equation. "The students staged a mock trial to decide if the piece was music or not," Gray says. "The jury was hung in the summer session but Cage was vindicated in the fall class." Gray will be teaching the math and music class at VSA again this summer, offering the course in both one-week and two-week formats.

Though Gray will soon be a full-time math teacher, he

remains a musician at heart and intends to remain one in practice, as well. "I've hardly had time to play lately, but I'll always find ways to perform. I'll never leave music—and it will never leave me."



Dawson Gray performing in the new Student Commons on the Peabody campus.

JOHN RUSSELL

50 Years of "Bye Bye Love"

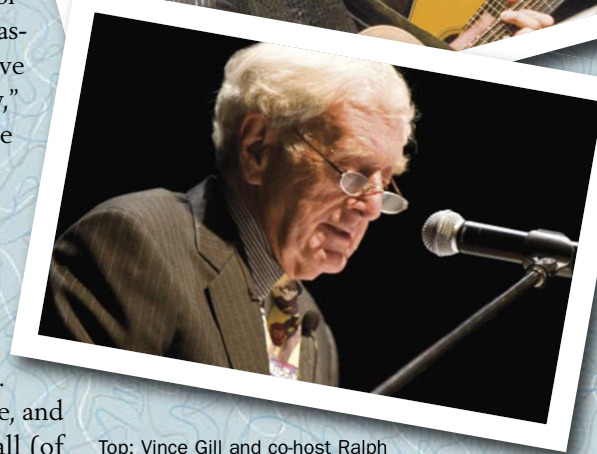
The first professional songwriters in Nashville were honored at a star-studded yet homespun tribute at Blair School of Music, an appropriate way to honor a duo described as "lovebirds" whose song-pitching strategy usually included a homecooked pasta supper.

"The music of Felice and Boudleaux Bryant is around us all the time," said John Seigenthaler, founder of Vanderbilt's First Amendment Center, who hosted the Sept. 28 event with broadcaster Ralph Emery. Steven Griel served as producer of the event.

It would be hard to argue the point when considering just a short list of the songs the Bryants contributed to popular music. Their songbooks, the originals of which were displayed in the lobby of Blair's Martha Rivers Ingram Center for the Performing Arts for the occasion, include enduring classics such as "Rocky Top," "All I Have to Do is Dream," "Country Boy," "Wake up Little Susie" and "Bye Bye Love."

In all, songs by the Bryants account for more than a half billion in records sales by artists including The Everly Brothers, Elvis Presley, Loretta Lynn, Ricky Nelson, Nazareth and many more.

"They were such sweet people, and there's a tinge of sweetness to all (of these songs)," said Del Bryant, Blair Key-Board member, president and CEO of



Top: Vince Gill and co-host Ralph Emery; Center, top: Del Bryant Center, bottom: Jon Randall and Vince Gill; Bottom: co-host John Seigenthaler

BMI and son of Boudleaux and Felice. Del, along with his brother, Dane Bryant, own the "House of Bryant" catalogue of their parents' songs and sponsored the tribute. A host of music luminaries also attended, including Phil Everly, Jim Foglesong, Sean Camp, Norro Wilson and Harold Bradley.

Footage from interviews with the Bryants (Boudleaux died in 1987, Felice in 2003) allowed the couple to tell their own story, including meeting when Felice sprayed Boudleaux with water while trying to help him at a water fountain. She was an elevator operator at a hotel, and he a musician hired to entertain.

Music for the evening was provided by Vince Gill and the newlywed couple Jon Randall and Jessi Alexander. Composer Alexandra Du Bois, who attended, created a string quintet arrangement of Bryant hits that started off the evening.

Three Bryant songs celebrating their 50th anniversary were noted, with "Bye Bye Love" and "Wake Up Little Susie" being performed by Alexander and Randall, while Gill brought out daughter Jennie Gill to duet on "All I Have to Do is Dream."

The evening ended with a singalong of "Rocky Top," marking one of the few times Commodore fans willingly sang along with the University of Tennessee fight song.

—Jim Patterson



Wilson Bequest Will Have Resounding Impact

The generosity of the late David K. (Pat) Wilson (BA'41) and his first wife, Anne Potter Wilson, and their families helped establish the Blair School of Music. And now, with a multi-million dollar bequest, that same generosity will help ensure the school's future.

Together, the Wilson and Potter family history of giving to Vanderbilt is exceptional. This bequest, left in memory of Anne Potter Wilson by Pat Wilson, is the largest ever received by the Blair School and will provide a number of scholarships to deserving students.

The first of the Anne Potter Wilson Honor Scholarships for Blair Undergraduate Students will be awarded in the fall of 2008. According to Dean Mark Wait, this gift will help Blair attract the nation's top music students.

"The competition for the brightest and most talented student-musicians increases every year. The funds provided by the Anne Potter Wilson Scholarships will help make Blair a more attractive option for many of those who are considering a musical education.

"With this gift, Pat Wilson has created a legacy that will touch the lives of countless young musicians," said Dean Wait. "We are forever in his debt."



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