

# Quarter Note

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY



Music from a *Closed Ward*  
The BSQ prepares for a premiere

On the cover: The Blair String Quartet clockwise from top (John Kochanowski, viola; Cornelia Heard, violin; Felix Wang, cello; and Christian Teal, violin) prepares for the premiere of *Images from a Closed Ward* written for the group by renowned American composer Michael Hersch.

Photo by John Russell

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*Editor*, Bonnie Arant Ertelt  
*Art Director*, Donna DeVore Pritchett  
*Designer*, Keith Wood  
*Contributors*, Joanne Beckham, Joan Brasher, Cindy Steine, William Williams

*Dean and Martha Rivers Ingram*  
*Dean's Chair*, Mark Wait  
*Associate Dean for Pre-college and Adult Programs*, Pam Schneller  
*Associate Dean for Development and Alumni Relations*, Virginia Payne  
*Director of External Relations*,  
Kristin Whittlesey

Pre-college, adult and undergraduate alumni are encouraged to send their professional or personal news to:

The BLAIR QUARTER NOTE  
2400 Blakemore Avenue  
Nashville, TN 37212-3499

Or by email to:  
[quarternote@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:quarternote@vanderbilt.edu)

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# From the *Dean*



Dean Mark Wait

The summer has seen a season of transitions at the Blair School. Indeed, the 2011-12 academic year will see more changes to the faculty than we have had in some time.

First, Jane and Frank Kirchner have retired from teaching at Blair. Jane taught flute at Blair for more than 40 years, and Frank was our saxophone instructor for many years. They provided expertise and inspiration to generations of Blair and Vanderbilt students, upholding the highest standards and guiding the Blair School in its dramatic progress. Now they will pursue their love of traveling and spending time with their grandsons. Although we will miss them terribly, we have the consolation of knowing that they will continue to live in Nashville and plan to attend events at Blair.

In addition, Cynthia Estill and Cassie Lee, who have taught bassoon and clarinet, respectively, in our collegiate program for more than

20 years, are making the transition to our Pre-college Program, which was the foundation of the Blair School and continues to be our anchor. Our pre-college students will be fortunate to have the benefit of their wisdom and expertise.

Joining the faculty of our collegiate program will be Brian Utley, adjunct associate professor of saxophone; Philip Dikeman, associate professor of flute; and Bil Jackson, associate professor of clarinet. You can read more about them on page 7. They join the Blair School as the result of extensive (and highly competitive) national searches. We are delighted to have these wonderful artists joining the Blair family.

I should add that we have an outstanding new class of 57 first-year students at Blair. These students continue a trend of the Blair School's upward trajectory, a trend that confirms the artistry and dedication of our excellent faculty.

There are other transitions, as well. After helping lead the transformation of the Blair School as chair of the KeyBoard for the past 16 years, Martha Rivers Ingram has stepped down. We are presenting a special concert in honor of Mrs. Ingram on September 18. I am pleased to announce that Nashville attorney Jim Harris, JD'67, now serves the KeyBoard as chairman, and we welcome him and his leadership in the coming years.

Mark Wait, Dean  
Martha Rivers Ingram Dean's Chair

# A Necessary *Musical Confluence*

By Bonnie Arant Ertelt

*Serendipity marks the creation of a new piece by composer Michael Hersch for the Blair String Quartet*



Creation, translation, interpretation, performance. The process of bringing a piece of music from the composer's hands to the ears of an audience is a long one that requires trust and commitment for both the composer and the commissioning ensemble. When the Blair String Quartet approached composer Michael Hersch about writing a string quartet for them, the tumblers fell into place for an extensive creative journey. In this case, *Images from a Closed Ward*, made possible through funds from the James Stephen Turner Family Foundation as part of the Blair Commissioning Project, has just begun that journey. That journey will not end with the premiere of the work next spring, but continue to develop and evolve with each subsequent performance of the piece.

How Hersch and the quartet came to work together is described by both as serendipitous.

"I had been asked a fair number of times over the last two decades to write string quartets," Hersch says, "but there was nothing in my imagination, nothing in my mind's ear. I didn't think that I could write a good one. I wanted to write other things, and I didn't hear a string quartet.

"It was an extraordinary confluence of events," he says. "If they had contacted me two or three months earlier, I would have said no. It's as simple as that."

The ignition point, as Hersch calls it, for writing a string quartet was living with prints by the American visual artist Michael Mazur, whom Hersch met in Rome in 2000. Mazur's *The Inferno of Dante*, an exhibition of 41 etchings with accompanying texts translated into English, was being shown at the American Academy in Rome at the time. As Hersch wrote in his composer's note to the piece for the Blair String Quartet, "Although we worked in different mediums, I often felt that Mazur understood what I was doing better than most." A friendship developed between the two artists.

Hersch acquired some of Mazur's prints in 2008 from the *Closed Ward* and *Locked Ward* series of etchings done in the early 1960s. They hang in his work space.

In mid-2009, "this amazing period of serendipitous events happened," Hersch says. "My mind's ear started composing a string quartet around these images of Mazur's, and then I was going to contact him." Instead, Hersch read of Mazur's death in a newspaper the day before he planned to reach him. "Not more than a few months later, I was contacted by the Blair String Quartet."

The Blair String Quartet listened to 30

or 40 different composers before deciding that they wanted to ask Michael Hersch to compose a piece for them. Each member of the quartet was inspired by different aspects of Hersch's work.

"For me," says John Kochanowski, professor of viola, "it was a certain passion that he brings to every piece he's written, and a discovery of voicing, as Beethoven voiced so beautifully. Michael has that ability to voice for four people in an extraordinary way. He really understands the conversational attitude, the parameters, the darkness, the ecstasy. We



were excited by the possibility that he could be a great quartet composer."

"We also wanted a prominent American composer who had not written for string quartet, so that this would bring some attention as the first string quartet of his work," says Christian Teal, Joseph Joachim Professor of Violin.

Connie Heard, Valere Blair Potter Professor of Violin, honed in on Hersch's ability to focus. "When we first listened to him," she says, "we listened to some

short piano pieces that he was playing. They were beautiful, very personal and focused—they weren't trying to do a lot of things. He will have the kernel of an idea and really develop that kernel rather than trying to do six different things at once.

"He's not bound by the instruments he's writing for. He's not afraid to be stark," she says. "He's not afraid to be performed only once."

Felix Wang, associate professor of cello, was impressed by Hersch's artistic integrity. "When you hear this piece, it's not going to be something a string quartet would sound like. It's not necessarily going to follow those parameters. The voice that you hear in his music is original."

"I think we just lucked out with the timing," Heard says, "where he was in his life, where he was with his composing. His thoughts were that we just happened to drop in at the right time."

Hersch was somewhat familiar with the Blair String Quartet as well.

"I'd never met any of them before," Hersch says, "but I knew John's name,



“When you hear this piece, it’s not going to be something a string quartet would sound like. It’s not necessarily going to follow those parameters. The voice that you hear in his music is original.”

—Felix Wang

because he was with the Concord Quartet, and I heard them a lot when I was younger. So he was very familiar to me, even though I didn’t know him. And I had known of the Blair quartet’s reputation broadly, because they had been around a long time in different iterations. All I had to do was hear them, and I listened to them a fair amount and was very excited.

“It just felt right, and deciding to write a piece for someone, a group or an individual, is a very serious commitment,” he says. “A lot has to be right. It’s as intimate a connection as you can have in terms of creating something.”



Kochanowski agrees. “There is no way to write a string quartet without tremendous intimacy,” he says. “Because of our four ways of discussing, arguing, doing everything we do with each other musically, I think it’s a challenge for someone to say, ‘I want to get involved in that discussion with four human beings.’”

Writing the piece took less time than the quartet expected, with the score delivered to them about six months ear-

lier than originally projected. Now that they have the score, there will be much more interaction between Hersch and the quartet, though, as Hersch puts it, the collaboration begins when you know for whom you’re writing.



“A lot of people think that there has to be a lot of back and forth, and that does happen,” he says, “but in this case, the process of composing the piece went relatively quickly, and the biggest part they played was that I felt that I could write whatever I wanted. That is participatory. That doesn’t mean that things won’t change after they start working on it,” he explains, “but I knew who I was writing for from the very beginning, and that’s a major collaboration in and of itself.”

The quartet met Hersch last February, when he came to Blair with his brother, horn player Jamie Hersch, and cellist Daniel Gaisford for a performance of Hersch’s *Last Autumn* for horn and cello. Hearing the piece, written in two parts and lasting two and a half hours, was revelatory for the quartet.

“The piece was stunningly beautiful, powerful,” Heard says. “The idea that someone could make French horn and cello work for two and a half hours is original and bold, and he is both those things. He is not a composer who is always trying to get his works performed. He’s writing for the purity of what he wants to write.”

Hersch puts it this way: “At the end of the day, one of the most important things for a composer is to feel that whatever the composer is writing feels necessary. So, if I’m going to write for a string quartet, I have to feel that the music I want to express, it’s necessary that it be a string quartet. It couldn’t have been anything else. And if you do a good job, all the things that are important to the musicians will follow.

“I was deeply moved that they approached me,” he says, “because it meant that they felt something in my work that they connected with. I will assure you that not everybody gets what I do,” he says with a laugh, “so when people do connect with it, that’s meaningful to me. It means that there’s something there that’s worth pursuing, because it doesn’t happen with regularity.”

“The performer/composer relationship can be very complicated,” Wang says. “Ultimately, it can be very rewarding, but it can be complicated because you have these artistic personalities that by nature have strong opinions. But the creative process of taking a piece of music, learning it and eventually performing it and letting it come to life is very satisfying. Spending time in collaboration with someone you deem artistically inspiring is very satisfying.

“And selfishly,” he adds, “we just want to be part of the process of bringing to life a masterwork.”

## From the Mind's Ear to a *Closed Ward*

**H**ow an artist or composer brings a work into being varies individually. As opposed to visual art, which is usually a solitary exercise, composing music cannot be entirely a one-on-one experience. The composer needs musicians as intermediaries to define the work for an audience. In the case of *Images from a Closed Ward*, the creative cycle began with visual artist Michael Mazur's etchings individually eliciting a response from composer Michael Hersch. Hersch then set about translating his feelings about the images musically, ultimately to be interpreted by the Blair String Quartet and rendered to many people in an audience, making the process one of creativity as domino effect.

"The fact that it was something visual [as a catalyst] was a new experience for me," Hersch says. "It's not about trying to render these [images] musically, it's more a shared experience. I found in these images something that I was feeling already, and they became, for lack of a better word, sort of companions with me in the journey of writing this piece."

"What I see in the artwork is a shared terrain," he says, "[the artwork and music] share similar human landscape. Below

the surface feels quite similar."

How Hersch brings that shared human landscape to the music is enhanced by his titles for each of the 12 movements in the work.

"Most of his movements have expressive titles," violinist Christian Teal says. "The third movement says 'longing, quiet, extreme grief.'"

"The second [movement] is 'ferociously,'" adds violinist Connie Heard. "The 11th movement says 'raging violently throughout,' and it was some of the most loud, 'raging violently throughout' music that we've ever played."

The climactic 11th movement is a massive contrapuntal movement that reminds the quartet of Beethoven's "Grosse Fuge", originally written as the last movement of the *Opus 130 Quartet in E flat Major*. This piece has been described by NPR commentator Cathy Fuller as "a roller-coaster ride: Beethoven takes four voices, fully engaged and throbbing at high speeds, and drives them to the edge of a cliff before stopping them on a dime to listen to the vastness of silence."

"This movement is quite long also," Heard says. "The difference is that in [Beethoven's] 'Grosse Fuge,' there



STEVE GREEN

**Michael Hersch, regarded as being among today's foremost pianists, was 25 when he won first prize in the American Composers Awards. He was one of the youngest recipients ever of a Guggenheim Fellowship in composition. He serves on the composition faculty of the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University.**

are moments of relief and moments of melodic beauty. In the 'raging violently throughout,' there is no relief. It was a very intense experience to read it the first time and say, 'Wow, how are we going to do this?'"

"It's interesting that for the movement right before that movement, [Hersch] writes the word 'frozen' over that, and it's a very sparse, quiet movement," Teal says.

"It makes a shocking moment that much more shocking," violist John Kochanowski says.

"My expectation would be that if someone had the experience of looking at these images," Hersch says, "and they separately had the experience of listening to the music, it wouldn't be surprising that they came away with similar feelings, even though each person is going to bring something different to the table."

"That's one of the wonderful things about art."

—Bonnie Arant Ertelt



STEVE GREEN

**The Blair String Quartet will premiere Michael Hersch's *Images from a Closed Ward* on Feb. 17, 2012, at Ingram Hall. The New York City premiere will take place on April 5, 2012, at Weill Recital Hall in Carnegie Hall.**

# New Faculty

**Philip Dikeman** has joined the Blair School of Music as associate professor of flute. He comes to Blair as acting principal flute of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and began playing with the DSO as assistant principal flute in 1992.

A native of Ann Arbor, Mich., Dikeman attended the Oberlin College Conservatory of Music, where he studied with Robert Willoughby and received a bachelor of music in 1985. In 1987, he received a master of music from the Yale School of Music, where he studied with Thomas Nyfenger and was named the George Wellington Memorial Scholar for his outstanding musical and academic excellence.

In 1987, Dikeman began his professional career when he was appointed principal flute of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, a position he held for five seasons. Prior to joining the DSO, he played principal flute for a short period with the San Antonio Symphony. He has also played guest principal flute with the Minnesota Orchestra and the St. Louis Symphony, and most recently joined the L.A. Philharmonic on its 2010 U.S. Tour as guest associate principal flutist.



**Bil Jackson** joins the Blair School as associate professor of clarinet. He enjoys a varied musical career that includes solo, orchestral and chamber music appearances. Jackson is the principal clarinetist with the Colorado Symphony Orchestra and the Aspen Chamber Symphony and has performed as principal clarinetist with the Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Minnesota, Cincinnati, and Honolulu symphony orchestras. He also has appeared as a soloist with the Colorado, Honolulu, Denver, Charlotte, Dallas Chamber and Aspen Chamber orchestras.

Jackson was most recently professor of clarinet at the University of Northern Colorado and is on the artist-faculty of



the Aspen Music Festival. He has also served on the faculties of the University of Texas, University of Colorado and Duquesne University. Jackson studied at the Interlochen Arts Academy, where he won the Academy's Concerto Competition three times and was awarded the gold medal for superlative musicianship upon graduation. He continued his formal study at Northwestern University with Robert Marcellus. Jackson is the only player ever to win the International Clarinet Competition twice, and he was a finalist in the Prague International Clarinet Competition.

**Brian Utley** has been named adjunct associate professor of saxophone at Blair. Previously, he was associate professor of saxophone at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. The Owensboro, Ky., native received the doctor of musical arts in saxophone performance, with a minor in music theory, from Louisiana State University. He also holds the master of music from Louisiana State University and the bachelor of

music from Murray State University. His primary saxophone teachers include Griffin Campbell and Scott Erickson.

Utley maintains a highly active performance schedule and has been a featured soloist with the Shreveport Symphony Orchestra and the Stephen F. Austin State University Wind Ensemble. He is a regular performer at regional and national conferences of the North American Saxophone Alliance and has also performed at conferences of the Texas chapter of the National Association of Composers, USA, the 2003 World Saxophone Congress, the 2006 Conference of the International Clarinet Association, and the 2011 University of Alabama-Huntsville New Music Festival. He also performs in a variety of chamber music settings and is a co-founder of the award-winning Red Stick Saxophone Quartet. He has recorded on the New Tertian Records and Magni Publications labels.



## Attorney Jim Harris chairs KeyBoard

Nashville attorney James (Jim) Harris III, JD'67, founder of the Music Row law firm of Harris Martin Jones, took the reins of the KeyBoard this past spring as chairman.

Harris opened his law firm on Music Row in Nashville in 1975 to concentrate his practice on music, copyright and entertainment law. An active civil litigator in these fields, he handles contract and copyright infringement cases for both plaintiffs and defendants. In the course of his career, he has represented artists, managers, writers, producers, publishers and the various business entities through which these music industry personnel pursue their careers. He was certified in February 2009 as a civil trial specialist by the Tennessee Commission on Continuing Legal Education and Specialization and by the National Board of Trial Advocacy. Harris has received an AV rating with Martindale-Hubbell, which identifies lawyers with a very high to pre-eminent legal ability, indicating that they practice in accordance with the highest professional and ethical standards. He was admitted to the Bar of the Supreme Court of the United States on June 6, 2011.

Harris has been a member of the KeyBoard since 2006. He succeeds Martha Rivers Ingram, who stepped down this year after chairing the Blair KeyBoard for 16 years, as well as chairing the Vanderbilt University Board of Trust.



SNODGRASS/BOB

# A Nest for Conductors

*Blair has graduated a number of successful conductors, despite having no formal program in orchestral conducting*

By William Williams



John Concklin, BMus '06, conducting the July 4th concert of the Georgia Symphony Orchestra last year.

Within the conducting profession, the word “maestro” is sometimes used to describe the person wielding the baton and coaxing joyous sounds from voice, instrument or both.

Blair School of Music’s community of maestros—gaining influence both at home and abroad—is venturing into the world of orchestral conducting with an energy and success that would spur Jorma Panula, renowned teacher of conducting, to step from the podium and take note.

Interestingly, Blair’s rise has come despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that it offers no degree in conducting.

“Fortunately, Blair does not have a conducting program, and this is fantastic as people like myself were able to take advantage of so many resources not available at other institutions where graduate students would have priority,” says Scott Seaton, who graduated from Vanderbilt in 2004 with a bachelor of music in saxophone performance. He now works at Kent State University in Ohio, conducting the orchestra, chamber orchestra and opera theatre, while also teaching undergraduate and graduate conducting.

“For example, in my senior year at Blair, I was able to form an all-volunteer orches-

tra and perform Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*,” Seaton explains. “I am not sure this would have been possible at other institutions.”

But those other institutions are, indeed, recognizing Blair School of Music’s talented graduates.

“Since Blair has had many rising conductors in recent years, I think that people are starting to notice that Blair is a fantastic nest for conductors to develop without the formalities of a conducting ‘program,’” Seaton says.

There may be no structured orchestral conducting program at Blair, however, Robin Fountain, professor of conducting and director of the Vanderbilt Orchestra, handles the preparation of orchestral conductors in a highly effective manner. Fountain’s efforts are the key to why the music school has seen its alumni earn admission to graduate schools such as Yale and Vienna Conservatory.

Fountain graciously downplays his role and impact at Blair, saying simply: “I try to train young musicians to collaborate as performers and conductors.”

Fountain—who has studied at Oxford University, the Royal College of Music and Carnegie Mellon University—decided he wanted to be a conductor when he was pressed into service while a member of his high school choir.

“I found that not only did I enjoy it, but that others enjoyed the work when I did it.”

As have Blair students.

“I decided I wanted to be a conductor after attending Professor Robin Fountain’s beginning conducting class,” says David Torns, who graduated from Vanderbilt in 1998 with a bachelor’s in violin performance. “From that point, I enrolled in the advanced class, and I was fascinated



with the possibilities of the symphony orchestra as a vessel for music. The colors and palettes that are available to a composer are limitless. So the possibilities for a conductor's interpretation in serving the composer become limitless as well."

John Concklin played with the Vanderbilt Orchestra at Blair, eventually earning his bachelor's in 2006 in viola and piano performance. The creative director of the Cobb Symphony Orchestra in Kennesaw, Ga., from 2008-10, Concklin spent this past year enrolled at the Cleveland Institute of Music. He says the tools he uses to lead an orchestra are based upon his experience as member of an orchestra.

"It's sort of like playing on a team," he says. "If you know how to play the game, then it stands to reason that you may be able to lead others in doing it themselves."

Torns says Blair provided personal guidance.

"I had wonderful coaching in chamber music from all of the members of the Blair String Quartet, which was immeasurable," Torns says. He currently serves as assistant conductor of the Baton Rouge Symphony and music director of the Louisiana Youth Orchestra.

In addition to recognizing Fountain, Torns credits Amy Dorfman, associate professor of piano, and Emelyne Bingham, senior lecturer of the teaching of music. The trio, among many others at Blair, helped Torns hone his skills in transitioning from

hearing the violin to hearing multiple instruments and understanding how they work in tandem.

Torns says such aural aptitude involves hearing the instruments' "particular colors."

"You can begin to pick out what an oboe is playing compared to a bassoon, for instance, because the two timbres are unique to one another," he notes. "At the same time, as a conductor you are trying to blend the two colors so that neither of them sticks out more than the other."

Getting to the point of hearing on that level requires years of work. For Blair's conductors, much was done long before arriving at that point.

Joseph Lee, who received his bachelor's from Vanderbilt in 1998 after studying bassoon, knew at a tender age he wanted to wield the baton.

"When I was 12 years old, I told my parents that I wanted to be a conductor and that I would need to begin lessons on a string instrument," says Lee, who filled in as adjunct assistant professor of orchestra and conducting during the spring 2011 semester while Fountain was on sabbatical.

Lee says he was inspired by both his middle school band director and civic youth orchestra conductor.

Today, Lee is the resident conductor of the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra, director of the Huntsville Youth Orchestra, and music director of the Murfreesboro Symphony Orchestra and the Sewanee



David Torns, BMus '98, is assistant conductor of the Baton Rouge Symphony and music director of the Louisiana Youth Orchestra.

Symphony Orchestra, the latter two to which he was recently appointed.

Lee echoes the words of Seaton, emphasizing the fact that Blair's lack of a formal conducting program gave him the freedom to "create my own path."

"I began my conducting studies as a sophomore," he recalls. "Not only did I organize my own 'lab' orchestras by bribing friends with pizza and soda, [Emelyne] Bingham also allowed me to share the podium with her during the Vanderbilt Opera Theatre production of Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. She had me conduct the entire first act, which was a monumental first experience for me."

Lee went on to take Blair's conducting courses and study privately with Fountain during the next two years.

"He would fast become my mentor and friend, a relationship that has continued into the present," Lee says.

Dean Whiteside understands the advantages of Blair's approach. Whiteside, who earned his bachelor's in viola and philosophy in 2010, was admitted to the prestigious Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien during his junior year—a notable accomplishment—but deferred until he could finish his Blair degree. He now studies conducting in Vienna full time and recently made his European debut conducting the Ruse Philharmonic (Bulgaria) on tour.

"Music-making should be a dialogue," Whiteside says, "and this is what Blair excels at creating."



Scott Seaton, BMus '04, conducting the Toronto Philharmonic Orchestra.

# Join us for the Fall 2011 Blair Concert Series

*Featured events include:*

## **A CELEBRATION CONCERT HONORING MARTHA RIVERS INGRAM**

**September 18, 3 p.m.**  
**Ingram Hall**

Martha Rivers Ingram has been a longtime patron of the Blair School of Music, Vanderbilt University and the arts in Nashville. This fall, Mrs. Ingram relinquishes her position as chair of Blair's KeyBoard after 16 years of dedicated service and stewardship. Please join us for a special concert featuring both new and long-beloved faculty artists and ensembles as we honor Mrs. Ingram for helping Blair become what it is today and will be in the future.

Schocker's *Suite Française for Flute and Piano* featuring Philip Dikeman, flute, and Melissa Rose, piano

Strauss's *Sonata in E-flat, Op. 18* featuring Carolyn Huebl, violin, and Mark Wait, piano

Debussy's *Première Rhapsodie* featuring Bil Jackson, clarinet, and Amy Dorfman, piano

Ravel's *Quartet in F Major* featuring the Blair String Quartet

*A wine reception in the lobby will follow the performance.*

*Presented by Chancellor Nicholas S. Zeppos and Lydia Howarth, Dean Mark Wait and Deborah Wait, and the Blair School of Music KeyBoard*

## **Bill Monroe's 100th Birthday Celebration**

**September 28, 7 p.m.**  
**Ingram Hall**

The Blair School of Music and the Country Music Hall of Fame join forces to celebrate what would have been the 100th birthday of bluegrass pioneer and founding father Bill Monroe. The evening will be a retrospective of Monroe's life accompanied by video, live music and stories, featuring top names in country and bluegrass. Be sure to watch [blair.vanderbilt.edu](http://blair.vanderbilt.edu) for more details about this very special celebration. This is a ticketed event.

*Sponsored by the Sartain Lanier Family Foundation*

## **The Blair String Quartet with special guest Bil Jackson, clarinet**

**October 14, 8 p.m.**  
**Ingram Hall**

Bil Jackson, new associate professor of clarinet at Blair and a renowned performer, joins the quartet for a performance of the Quintet for Clarinet and Strings by Mozart, one of the great works of chamber music. The program opens with the String Quartet No.1, Op. 49 of Dmitri Shostakovich and closes with Ravel's only string quartet.

*Sponsored by Marsha and Ken Mifflin*



## **BLAIR PRESENTS A Special Evening with the Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet**

**October 27, 8 p.m.  
Ingram Hall**

After a hugely successful Blair debut last fall, the world's most celebrated wind quintet returns by popular demand, with an exciting and wide-ranging program showcasing their range of expression, their tonal spectrum and their conceptual unity. Don't miss this rare opportunity to enjoy these world-class artists.

*Sponsored by an anonymous friend of the Blair School of Music*

*Blair thanks the Hutton Hotel for providing accommodations for the members of the Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet Artist management for the Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet provided by David Rowe Artists*

### **Audra McDonald**

**November 15, 8 p.m.**

#### **Steve and Judy Turner Recital Hall**

Winner of four Tony Awards, Broadway legend Audra McDonald returns to the concert stage after four seasons on the hit ABC television series *Private Practice*. The two-time Grammy winner will perform an intimate evening of favorite show tunes, classic songs from the movies, and original pieces written expressly for her. McDonald is an extraordinary artist who is at the height of her expressive powers.

*Sponsored by the Mary Cortland Ragland Master Series Fund*

### **Cellist Laurence Lesser performs Bach's Six Suites for Solo Cello in a two-concert presentation**

**December 3, 8 p.m. and December 4, 1:30 p.m.**

#### **Steve and Judy Turner Recital Hall**

Laurence Lesser was a top prize winner in the 1966 Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, and has been soloist with orchestras around the world. One of the foremost cello pedagogues in the world, he has taught at the New England Conservatory of Music since 1974, where he was also the president for 13 years. He was teaching assistant to legendary cellist Gregor Piatigorsky and was a guest on the historic Heifetz-Piatigorsky concerts and recordings. As part of his residency, he will also present master classes and lectures. Check the Blair website for the latest details.

These are just a few of the concerts scheduled for your enjoyment. Visit the website at <http://blair.vanderbilt.edu> for more information about concerts and events at the Blair School of Music.



# A Talent that Resonates

*Pre-college student Amy Thompson writes and performs with remarkable maturity*

By Joanne Lamphere Beckham, BA'63

Not many teenagers would attempt to write a two-act chamber opera based on Shakespeare's play *The Winter's Tale*. But that's exactly what 16-year-old Amy Thompson has been doing for more than a year.

"It's been a long, drawn-out project, but I hope to finish it by the end of the summer," she says.

"It started as an assignment to read one of Shakespeare's plays and write a prelude. As I was reading, I kept thinking, 'This would make a good aria here.' I was telling that to Dr. Deakin, and he asked if I would like to write an opera. I think now, if I could go back, I'd say, 'No, I don't want to do this thing that's going to take years,'" she says with a laugh.

This remarkable Blair pre-college student also practices harp and piano four hours a day, studies high-school physics, pre-calculus, Bible, German and economics, and takes an online English course from Nashville State Community College.

"Amy is one of the most gifted pre-college students I have ever had the privilege to teach at Blair," says Paul Deakin, senior lecturer in music theory. "She completed our four-year college-level theory program in a year—an incredible achievement. She has been taking private composition lessons for two years and has already produced several works of the highest quality."

Home-schooled since she was 7, Thompson began piano instruction at age 6 and lessons on a tiny harp when

she was 11. She enrolled at Blair in the eighth grade, receiving the Myra Jackson Blair Scholarship for harp in ninth grade and for piano last year.

Thompson has composed several pieces for piano and harp, including "a compelling piece for voice and harp," Deakin says, "a series of haiku by the Japanese poet Basho connected to create a cyclic form that takes the listener on a journey through the seasons. It's a beautiful work."

Thompson is also an accomplished performer. She placed seventh in her division at the 18th American Harp Society National Competition held in Salt Lake City, Utah. In 2010 she won the Nashville Area Music Teachers Association's Young Artists Achievement Award for piano in

the junior/senior category, as well as the Sewanee Summer Music Festival's 2010 Concerto Competition.

Marian Shaffer, adjunct professor of harp, calls Thompson "a wonderfully talented student who truly loves all aspects of music." Valerie Middleton, adjunct artist teacher of piano, says her technique and artistry exhibit "a refinement few high school students achieve."

Although she feels most comfortable with the piano, Thompson's heart belongs to a beautiful, 80-pound Lyon and Healy harp, which she brings back and forth from her home in Springfield, Tenn., several times a week.

"I love the way the harp resonates and vibrates on my shoulder," she says. "My fingers are in direct contact with what makes the sound. I also love the look of the harp."

So what does this hard-working student do for fun? "Music is fun," she says. But like any teen, the soft-spoken brunette enjoys friendships with the other pre-college students at Blair. She also completed a half-marathon last year and volunteers her time playing the harp at nursing homes on a regular basis.

As for the future, Thompson envisions a teaching career. "I want to continue to study at an academic university," she says, noting that only three schools in the top 20 offer courses in harp: Vanderbilt, Rice and Northwestern.

Deakin predicts great things for his gifted student: "With all that she's accomplished thus far, I wonder, 'What's next?' She has the world at her feet."

*"I love the way the harp resonates and vibrates on my shoulder. My fingers are in direct contact with what makes the sound."*



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Blair's brightest students audition each year for a chance to perform on the Blair Student Showcase held during the spring semester.

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Artist Michael Shane Neal painted the portrait of Del Sawyer, the Blair School of Music's first dean, that hangs outside the Office of the Dean at Blair. The portrait was unveiled in May 2009.



On April 9, at the Blair Big Band's spring concert, Associate Dean Dwayne Sagen (right) presented Billy Adair, senior lecturer of jazz and director of the Blair Big Band, with the news that the Billy Adair Fund for Jazz has been endowed in his name. The fund, the first of its kind at Blair, will provide discretionary support for the jazz department. The anonymous donor who created the endowment wished to honor Billy for his treasured friendship and support of the students of the Blair School.

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## Blair's Thomas is finalist on *The Voice*

Vanderbilt student Patrick Thomas advanced to the finals on the NBC television show *The Voice*, which aired on Tuesdays during the spring and summer.

The rising junior from Dallas (Class of 2013), is pursuing a double major in voice at the Blair School of Music, and economics in the College of Arts and Science.

A country singer who hails from Colleyville, Texas, he wowed audiences with his rendition of Tim McGraw's "Live Like You Were Dying" in his first audition.

The show is similar to *American Idol* in that home viewers vote for their favorites. What's unique is that the judges, including pop songstress Christina Aguilera and country crooner Blake Shelton, select which contestants they would like to mentor during the competition based on hearing them—but not seeing them—perform.



PHOTO COURTESY OF NBC

JOHN RUSSELL



**Kristin Whittlesey** (left) has been appointed the Blair School of Music's director of external relations. Before joining Blair in May, Kristin served as the assistant lifestyles editor at *The Tennessean*. She has a broad array of editorial experience in print and online publications, including serving as editor of *The Rage*, *All The Rage* and *Metromix*. She also worked as a copy editor and news and wire editor at the *Nashville Banner*.

**Cindy Steine**, who served as director of external relations at Blair for more than 10 years, left Nashville to join her husband, Raoul Russell, who is a member of the diplomatic corps at the United States Embassy in Nicosia, Cyprus. Cindy joined the Blair School in 2001 as part of the team that inaugurated the Martha Rivers Ingram Center for the Performing Arts, directing the school's public relations, venue management and community relations initiatives.



# 2011 Commencement Honors and Awards



DANIEL DUBOIS

**Founder's Medalist:** Lillian Elizabeth Johnson  
**Banner Bearer:** Madeline Sarah Myers  
**Alma Mater Vocalist:** Hilary Elizabeth White  
**Commencement Performer:** Blake Anthony Johnson (cello)  
**Student Marshals:** Erin Mara Steigerwald and John A. Woller III

**Newly elected members of the Eta Iota Chapter of Pi Kappa Lambda, the music honor society**

**Class of 2011**  
Paul Jeremy Dab  
Michelle Kiyoko Godbee  
Emily Cannon Green  
Maria Grace Hibbard  
Lillian Elizabeth Johnson  
Scott Franklin Lee  
Madeline Sarah Myers  
Anna Victoria Perretta  
Erin Mara Steigerwald  
John Arnold Woller III

**Class of 2012**  
Peter Neil Dayton III  
Caroline Marie Hart  
Jeannette Lucie Mathieu  
Lindsey Elizabeth Reymore  
Meredith Mallison Vaughan

## AWARDS

**Sigma Alpha Iota College Honor Award:** Lara Marie Pitts

**Sigma Alpha Iota Scholastic Award:** Kathryn Gay Heaton

**Achievement in Teaching Recognition Award:**

Lauren Elizabeth Pratt

**The Blair Volunteer Service through Music Award:**

Andrew Henry Silverstein and Michelle Kiyoko Godbee

**Martin Williams Award:** Lillian Elizabeth Johnson

**Robin Nell Dickerson Award:** Kathryn Gay Heaton

**Delene Laubenheim McClure Memorial Prize in Opera:**

Thomas Boatwright Mulder

**Confroy-Lijoi Award:** John Charles Fontaine and

Brent Stanley Baker

**Magda Lachs Award:** Matthew Benjamin Edquist

**L. Howard "Zeke" Nicar Award:** Thomas Robert Crespo

**Jean Keller Heard Prize:** Justin Edward Goldsmith,

Kelsey Elizabeth Hudson and Dana Jillian Kelley

**Sue Brewer Award:** Andrew Henry Silverstein

**Richard C. Cooper Award:** Allison Drucker Winstein

**Gall/Martin Collaborative Arts Award:** Paul Jeremy Dab

**Elliott and Ailsa Newman Prize:** Audrey Olivia Whittle

**S.S and I.M.F. Marsden Award:** Erin Mara Steigerwald

**David Rabin Prize:** Christopher Daniel Lowry

**Margaret Branscomb Prize:** Luke Sebastian Witchger

**Presser Award:** Lindsey Elizabeth Reymore



STEVE GREEN

Dean Mark Wait presents Lara Pitts with the Richard C. Cooper Award during award ceremonies held in April as Associate Dean Pam Schneller looks on.



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