

OctOBOEfest '99

By Emily Helvering

The University of Iowa — Iowa City, Iowa

As the colors of fall graced the University of Iowa campus this past October, numerous oboists gathered to participate in Iowa's OctOBOEfest 1999. This was the fifth OctOBOEfest workshop to occur in Iowa. The focus this year was on the fellowship and communication of oboists throughout Iowa and beyond. The three days of intensive musical activity that transpired surely did the trick!

The event opened on Friday, October 15, 1999 with a solo recital presented by the workshop's host, **Mark Weiger**, who demonstrated his striking technical and musical powers with a truly varied program. Weiger opened with the wild and passionate *Sommergesang* for oboe and piano



Mark Weiger

by Miguel del Aguila. Having recorded the work for Centaur Records, Weiger not only offered a rousing performance but an entertaining address to the audience. To round out this all-American program Weiger was assisted by the members of the Iowa Woodwind Quintet to present the John Harbison *Quintet for Woodwinds* somewhat in preparation for their performances in Curitiba, Brazil two weeks later. During the intermission the Double Reed Ensemble of Iowa entertained onlookers in the lobby area. To the surprise of many Weiger was found to be directing! Following the break the members of the Iowa Center for New Music and its director, David Gompper, joined Weiger for the *Quintet for Oboe and Strings* by New Yorker Robert Brooks, and the *Concertino* for oboe and chamber ensemble by Bostonian (Harvard) Bernard Rands. Weiger's New York premiere of the Rands' *Concertino* a year ago was hailed by the *New York Times* as "Mellifluous, haunting oboe playing by Mark Weiger." Gerald Gabel of the *SCI Journal* writes "Weiger's virtuosic abilities were a perfect match for this difficult work ... Not since Heinz Holliger in his prime have we heard an oboist with his control and mastery." On this, the Opening Night for OctOBOEfest '99, nothing less was offered.

On Saturday morning--Day 2--activities began

with a chamber music master class presented by **Henry Schuman**, Manhattan School of Music faculty member and interim professor at Indiana University. Chamber groups from the University of Northern Iowa and the University of Iowa presented selections from the Klughardt *Quintet*, the Bax *Quintet*, Beethoven *Trio, Op. 87*, and the Mike Curtis *Klezmer Trios*. Never without energy, ideas, or wit, Schuman worked his magic from the very center of the ensembles, bringing out each group's potential.

In a nearby room, with an array of oboes, knives, CDs and more, was the always effervescent **Carlos Coelho**. (It should be noted that the University of Iowa plays host to two other Coelhos: **Benjamin Coelho** is the assistant professor of bassoon and Tadeu Coelho is the associate professor of flute.) Their popularity aside, "Carlos' Corner" quickly became the gathering place for participants in the workshop. Also on display here were photos from OctOBOEfest-gone-by, T-shirts for purchase, and T-shirt-quilt gifted by Jen Hanzlik to the University of Iowa for the newly renovated Reed Room. Needless to say, it was always easy to hear the testing of instruments and lively discussion emanating from this corner between performances and classes.

That afternoon two recitals were presented. The first featured **Stacey Willer Berk**, the newest member of the oboe section of the Des Moines Symphony, Iowa's primary orchestra, and **Kevin Schilling**, the double reed professor at Iowa State University. Berk performed the Vincent Persichetti *Parable III, Op. 109* for solo oboe, the Grovlez *Sarabande & Allegro*, and one of her own compositions, *Myths*, an unaccompanied piece inspired by Britten's *Six Metamorphoses After Ovid, Op. 49*. *Myths* proved a worthwhile and intriguing work that stretches up to c'' for which she very kindly offers a no-miss fingering! Her calm performance demeanor masked well the rigors of her program. Dr. Schilling demonstrated his versatility by performing both the bassoon and oboe sonatas of Camille Saint-Saëns as well as a charming composition by colleague Robert Rathmell entitled *Three Lyric Pieces*.

Following this recital came a recital featuring the students at the University of Iowa. The program opened with **Megan Weiss** presenting

the Malcolm Arnold Fantasy for solo oboe, and was followed by **Christopher Scheer's** selection from the Arnold Bax *Quintet*, a movement from the Mozart *Quartet in F* with **Emily Helvering**, the Schumann *Romance No. 1* with **Alisia Ortega**, selections from a Telemann sonata with **Katy Kammeyer** and closing the first half with **Jolie Chrisman** presenting the Colin Les *Echos des Marnes*. The second half opened with a movement from the Christian Barth *Sonate Brillant* with **Enid Wright**, followed by selected movements from the Cimarosa *Concerto* with **Heidi Venaas**, the Theodore Lalliet *Fantasia sur "Martha" de Flotow* with **Lauren Klein**, the Hamilton Harty *A La Campagne* with **Lindsay Ladman**, selections from Britten's *Temporal Variations* with **Betsey Zenk**, and closing with the Telemann *Fantasia #2 in A minor* with **Megan Hanzlik**.

Sometime on Saturday afternoon, we lost **Kevin Vigneau** to Eble Music located in downtown Iowa City. Kevin is the oboe professor at the University of New Mexico and among other things is a member of the Sante Fe Opera Orchestra. Fortunately he did return before his performance that evening (there was actually never any question). In this concert, each of the guest artists performed works with the Maia String Quartet, the quartet in-residence at the University of Iowa. First on the program was Henry Schuman with a charming and even lusty performance of the Mozart *Quartet in F, K. 370*. The quartet members balanced his thoughtful performance measure for measure. Next on the docket was Kevin Vigneau's fantastic performance of the Britten *Phantasy Quartet*. Here the quartet members readily changed gears, adapting their color, vibrato and even nuance, to suit this new member of their group. The Maia Quartet performed the string quartet by Pierre Jalbert that absolutely stole the show! Weiger closed out the program with a little dessert music, the *Divertimento in C Major, Op. 9* by Bernard Crusell. It should be said that the Double Reed Ensemble of Iowa put forth another audience pleasing intermission performance in the lobby. Curiously, these intermission events took on a sort of cult-like appreciation from a large number of die-hard audience members.

Sunday morning—Day 3—came early, beginning with a flurry of activity. In one hall, Kevin Vigneau taught a master class, while in another, the 4th Solo Contest for Iowa High School Oboists was



Judges and finalist for the 1999 Iowa's OctOBOEfest competition for high school oboists.

taking place. In Vigneau's master class students from ISU and the U of I performed. Vigneau demonstrated a remarkable ability in putting the players at ease before giving comments. Addressing the performers and a full-to-capacity audience he offered excellent advice, making changes quickly noticeable to all.

Meanwhile, the Solo Contest taking place was being judged by **Dr. Andrea Gullickson** (oboe professor, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh; member, WIZARDS!), **Benjamin Coelho** (professor of bassoon, University of Iowa), and **Matthew Sintchak** (professor of saxophone, University of Iowa; member, Anicia Sax Quartet). The Third Prize winner was **Lia Gracey** from Burlington, Iowa. Second Prize went to **Sara Rogis** from Dewitt, Iowa. And, First Prize was awarded to **Katie Sullens** of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. A word of thanks must go to our two accompanists, Laura Tiong and Sara Mueske, who so agreeably and competently accompanied all of the University of Iowa students as well as all of the visiting students in all of the master classes, recitals, and the competition.

In wrapping up the morning's activities we were introduced to and encouraged to partake in *The Coelho Workout for Oboe* with its author, Tadeu Coelho. Over twenty participants assembled their instruments to try the workout which consists of daily exercises with a twist, a Latin twist that is. The workout book comes with a CD program that offers a Latin style accompaniment with the intent of making daily practice routines more rewarding. The book and accompanying CD are available through Carlos Coelho and through Eble Music.

That afternoon a concerto concert was

presented by one of the University of Iowa's Chamber Orchestras featuring the already mentioned guests and a newcomer, **Chen Chengzhang**. Mr. Chen, who is the oboe professor at the Wuhan Conservatory of Music in Wuhan, China was joined by his wife, Cai Minchhu (also from the Wuhan Conservatory) for a charming performance of the Bach *Concerto in C Minor for Oboe and Violin, BWV 1060*. As the violin Minchhu normally uses belongs to the Chinese government, the Reck Violin Shop of Iowa City very generously donated a beautiful instrument, making the performance that much more of a success. It should also be noted here that their presence on the campus was made possible through Andrea Gullickson who received a Vander Puttin International Grant through her university. Her success as a soloist under management has taken her to Poland, the Czech Republic, and most recently to various parts of China that included Wuhan. An alumna of the University of Iowa, she very generously arranged their exchange visit to be a shared opportunity with our campus.

Kevin Vigneau followed with a truly dazzling performance of Vivaldi's *Concerto in C Major*. Henry Schuman offered a different Vivaldi concerto, that in D minor. Weiger concluded the program with a performance of the virtuoso concerto by Pietro di Simoni Palermitano, oboist of the late 18th century. Himie Voxman, in his vast years of research, had passed the Palermitano concerto on to Weiger who, with the help of Jolie Chrisman (UI Presidential Scholar and oboist), has prepared the work for pressing through Connors Publications.

The final event of OctOBOEfest 1999 was a

chamber concert presented by the guest artists with University of Iowa colleagues. Opening the program was an endearing performance of the *Trio* by Poulenc with Henry Schuman, Benjamin Coelho and Iowa's newest addition to the piano faculty, Ksenia Nosikova. You should be sure to look for them at the 2000 IDRS convention in Argentina! Vigneau was joined by his wife, Kimberly Fredenburgh on viola, for a delicious rendition of the Loeffler *Deux Rhapsodies*. Closing the festival was the *Nonetto, Op. 38* by Louise Farrenc with Weiger and his faculty colleagues. This concert was to be the fifth event of the weekend with the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts in attendance! How many schools can boast such a thing?

Largely due to our sponsors, OctOBOEfest proved a great success. Because of them, the workshop was again able to bring in excellent performers/ clinicians, all free of charge to the participants. These sponsors include Carlos Coelho, Midwest Musical Imports, Eble Music, West Music, Reck Violin Shop, Dr. Reed, WiZARDS! The Double Reed Consort, and David J. Nelson, Director of the School of Music at the University of Iowa. My advice for those who didn't make it this year: don't wait for the movie; buy the t-shirt, maybe; but run, not walk, to OctOBOEfest 2001!!

About the author ...

Emily Helvering is currently on the faculty at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, IA and at Grinnell College in Grinnell, IA. She is also pursuing her DMA degree in oboe performance at the University of Iowa where she serves as the oboe teaching assistant.