

Bubbling Over Hot Springs

By **Kristen Marks Sonneborn**
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For the past three years I have spent two weeks in the early part of June teaching and performing at the Hot Springs Music Festival in Arkansas. Nestled amidst the densely forested Ouachita Mountains southwest of Little Rock, the historical town of Hot Springs is actually within the boundaries of a national park, boasting beautiful lakes, hiking trails, pure spring water—and one U.S. President!

Quaint spas and bath houses abound, and thousands flock to the city for therapeutic reasons. In fact, Native Americans of several different tribes were known to commune here for the water's curative and spiritual powers. Adversaries would lay down their weapons rather than fight on such sacred ground.

Centuries later, during Hot Springs more "sordid" past, the same truce applied to famous gangsters from cities like Chicago and Detroit who would come to Hot Springs to gamble. They maintained it as a neutral territory—no shooting allowed! Hot Springs was once a bigger gambling and entertainment mecca than Las Vegas, and when the casinos finally closed down, the newspaper headlines in Nevada were huge.

Nowadays, Hot Springs is relatively sleepy. It's no longer a haven

for gangsters and gamblers, but for artists of all mediums. Art galleries and antique shops line Central Avenue downtown as well as many restaurants and specialty stores. Each fall, Hot Springs hosts a critically acclaimed documentary film festival, and now in early summer musicians from all over the world gather for the Hot Springs Music Festival.

The music festival is the brain child of Artistic Director Richard Rosenberg and Executive Director Laura Rosenberg. Trying to bridge the gap in education between a student's life at music school and winning that first



Bassoons (L to R) Top Row: Kristen Marks Sonneborn, Susan Gustavson, Melissa Mackey, Gail Penna. Bottom Row: Michael Harris, Natasha Talesnick

professional gig, they created the festival to provide additional training for aspiring young talent. In addition to instrumentalists, there are also vocalists and apprentice conductors.



Oboes (L to R): Kyle Mustain, Felisa Wolfe, Michael Clardy, Alfred Genovese, Heather Ashe, Lesley McClelland

Audition is by tape, and those accepted to the program receive full scholarships. The only cost to the apprentice is their meals and travel. This past summer, apprentices came from all over the U.S., Canada, Europe, Asia, South America and even South Africa.

Similar to the now defunct student portion of the Grand Teton Music Festival, young Apprentice Artists from colleges and conservatories work closely with a professional Mentor Artist in each section of the orchestra. The Apprentice Artists rotate stands so as to divide the parts equally and gain experience

playing principal and in the section. Mentor Artists have the option of playing principal or section—or not at all, depending on the work being performed. It is often beneficial for the apprentices to sit beside their mentor in the section and learn things such as phrasing, articulation, balance and projection on the job. Other times apprentices gain more from playing the part by themselves but with the mentor nearby at rehearsals to give comments and lend encouragement.

While the bulk of performances involve full orchestra or chamber orchestra, there is some chamber music—often impromptu. Apprentices also receive private lessons and/or master classes. There are some opportunities for improvisation and for jazz. All rehearsals and most master classes are open to the public, and concerts are generally well attended.

I have been the bassoon mentor since the festival's inception three years ago. Jeff Rathbun, assistant principal oboe with the Cleveland Orchestra was the oboe mentor the first two seasons, but because Jeff was on tour to Japan last summer, Alfred Genovese, principal oboe with the Boston Symphony

kindly stepped in. Some repertoire highlights for the double reeds last summer included: *Piano Quintet in E-flat* by Beethoven; Mozart's *Bassoon Concerto*, the *Gran Partita*, "Jupiter" *Symphony* and *Requiem*; Stravinsky's *Fireworks*, *op. 4* and *Symphonies of Winds*; Handel's *Music for Royal Fireworks*; Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 4*; Milhaud's *Le Boeuf sur le Toit*; and Holst's *The Planets*—complete with Heckelphone!

Each year the festival grows and improves. It is rewarding to see and hear the progress made by the Apprentice Artists. Many enjoy their experience enough to return again the next season. Still others appreciate the fact that the festival takes place early in the summer so they may continue on to other teaching and performing opportunities, or festivals such as Tanglewood. For more information about the 1999 Hot Springs Music Festival, call the festival office at (501) 623-4763.

I would like to congratulate the Apprentice Artists pictured below for their fine work, and I want to thank Al Genovese and Laura and Richard Rosenberg for making the 1998 Hot Springs Music Festival a wonderful experience! ❖

Errata:

The new bassoon music MUSICAL GESTURES: EXERCISES IN EXPRESSION by Peter Simpson, which is reviewed on p. 112 of the last DOUBLE REED (Vol. 21, No. 2), is available from the author for \$10.00 plus \$2.00 shipping at 3362 Coldstream Drive, Lexington, KY 40517. Peter Simpson is Professor of Bassoon at the University of Kentucky.