

1 December 2006

Dear Music Lover,

A modern-day Aesop's fable: Recently, I attended a presentation by Mission: Wolf with my husband, David Alpher, in the gym at SUNY Ulster, our local community college. We sat on the floor with several hundred of our neighbors, while a wolf trotted among us (on a leash!), bestowing the occasional sniff or lick. Then we tried to make the wolf howl. When our massed chorus of human howls failed to stimulate her, a Mission: Wolf volunteer whipped out his cell phone, on which he had a recording of an entire wolfpack howling. He placed the receiver close to the wolf's ear and hit "play." She scratched herself with a hind leg. He played it again. Nothing. We never did hear that wolf howl.

That wolf instinctively knew something that we, besotted with the latest electronic gadgetry, are in danger of losing sight of as a society: that an electronically reproduced sound is not the same as the sound itself. Yes, you can hear it; but it is not *alive*. It cannot touch you, move you, transform you the way a living sound can. That is the irreplaceable magic of live music, and the Chamber Arts Festival of Marbletown's reason for being: to bring the very finest in classical and non-classical chamber music to the mid-Hudson Valley, in a setting so intimate you can almost *feel* those living sound-waves thwack you in the chest.

David, the Chamber Arts Festival's artistic director, has a mission to share the festival's cultural riches with the community. In just two seasons, the festival has presented master classes with festival musicians at Rondout Valley High School, and two series of free pre-concert "discussions" with David and special guests illuminating some of the pieces to be performed that season, in partnership with the Stone Ridge Library. We've given \$1000 in scholarships to Rondout seniors going on to study music in college. Last year, we were able to slash ticket prices for high school students from \$10 to \$0 (not a typo). And we'd like to offer more: family concerts, an "instrument petting zoo" for children, another week (or two!) of concerts, even—who knows?—our own chamber-music building or campus, which would root us even more deeply in Marbletown's soil.

But the festival is not "just" a Marbletown phenomenon. Like Maverick Concerts, Bard SummerScape, the Woodstock Film Festival, Dia:Beacon, and the Culinary Institute of America, the Chamber Arts Festival of Marbletown is one of the Hudson Valley's cultural treasures. Already the Festival has hosted the dynamic young Brentano and Vega string quartets, who between them have won every chamber music award, including the prestigious Naumburg; a fireworks extravaganza disguised as a piano recital by Georgian virtuoso Alexander Korsantia; and the impeccable Amadeus Trio, whose violinist stuck around after the concert to give audience members a closer look at his rare peanut-shaped Strad.

At the same time, the Chamber Arts Festival of Marbletown doesn't limit its programming to top classical ensembles. For David, the "chamber arts" encompass intimate live encounters with small-ensemble music of all genres—like West Texas Swing, as interpreted on fiddle and guitar by Jay Ungar and Molly Mason, or a cabaret of songs by Richard Rodgers with his brilliantly mismatched lyricists Lorenz Hart and Oscar Hammerstein, or a world premiere by celebrated avant-garde composer George Crumb, with the composer himself on percussion. What remains consistent, whatever the genre, is the exceptional quality of programs and performers.

Every summer, I buy baskets of tiny golden Shiro plums at Bruce Davenport's farmstand in Stone Ridge. I can't resist their delicate translucent flesh, their intense sweet-tart succulence, though they cost much more than industrial supermarket plums. The Chamber Arts Festival of Marbletown has a lot in common with a Shiro plum: it's small and homegrown, a regional specialty, uniquely delicious—and expensive to produce. Your support is key to the festival's survival, and even more so, to its growth, and to an ever-wider dissemination of its plums throughout our Hudson Valley community.

Some far-sighted angels have already recognized the value of nurturing a world-class young festival with an innovative vision: Assemblyman Kevin Cahill, who gave us \$5000 in local initiative funds; the Argosy Foundation, which underwrote George Crumb's appearance to the tune of \$9500; and Flemming Realty, our very first \$5000 concert sponsor. But that money brought you the festival's '05 and '06 seasons; we now face the challenge of paying for the '07 season, which will run May 25—June 3 at SUNY Ulster's Quimby Theatre in Stone Ridge (watch for our brochure!).

Of course we want you to buy tickets, but ticket sales cover less than one-third of our costs. Because of its extreme youth, our festival is not yet eligible for grants that more established arts organizations rely on. David routinely puts in 60-hour weeks for no salary whatever. The all-volunteer board knocks itself out producing the festival's brochures, program books, ads, grant proposals, fundraisers, *et al., ad inf.* I'm not getting paid to write this letter, but it will cost hundreds of dollars to print and bulk-mail to you. That's why we need you to go beyond ticket-buying, if possible, to support our work. Please consider becoming a Friend of the Festival, or, if your finances permit, partially or fully sponsoring a concert. (The enclosed sheet includes details of the festival's giving schedule and a donation form.) Contribute whatever your pocketbook allows; your investment will bear exquisite fruit.

We look forward to sharing the music with you. Thank you!

Jennie Litt