

CLARINETFEST® 2014 — A

SUMMARY

by *Melissa Morales*

ClarinetFest® 2014 took place on the campus of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana — a Southern gem of hospitality, iconic cuisine and lovely landscapes of oaks, the Mississippi River and eclectic architecture. A record number of more than 1400 registrants attended the conference which featured events across the university campus in the Music and Dramatic Arts Building, School of Music Building and Student Union Theater.

Before the conference began, the clarinet community suffered a great loss. During their travels to ClarinetFest® 2014, recent Baylor University graduate Laura Ezinwa Onwudinanti and student John Patrick Stewart both died in a car accident which left students Jacob Travis Hale and Megan Taylor Ritzi severely injured. To honor the students, the I.C.A. held a moment of silence before each evening concert throughout the conference and the opening Board Recital. The Lone Star Wind Orchestra has also opened a scholarship fund in memory of John Stewart. Donations can be made at <http://lonestarwindorchestra.com>.

This year's ClarinetFest® was organized by Robert DiLutis, associate professor of clarinet at the University of Maryland; and his artistic team members William Blayney, principal of the Seattle Philharmonic; Robyn Jones, assistant professor at The University of Memphis; Michael Bartnik, assistant professor at Nichols University; John Coppa, doctoral candidate at Louisiana State University; and Katie Young, professor at Louisiana College. This year's theme was "The Clarinetist as Entrepreneur," a concept that is becoming increasingly prevalent in the field as traditional career paths are becoming less secure and the pool of incredibly talented musicians is growing. Entrepreneurs from the Zodiac Festival, Clarinet Mentors, Lisa's Clarinet Shop and many others offered ample expertise and instruction on how today's clarinetists can forge their own opportunities to create a successful and fulfilling musical career. With inspiring performances, master classes, lectures and competitions, ClarinetFest® 2014 offered a wealth of knowl-

edge, experience and inspiration across a myriad of vocational possibilities.

Lectures

While it would be impossible to outline every lecture and workshop at ClarinetFest® 2014, several themes and key points of entrepreneurship emerged. Ramon Ricker, author of *Lessons from a Streetwise Professor* and music business professor at the Eastman School of Music, gave the conference's opening address on Wednesday, July 29, in which he discussed the importance of entrepreneurship in the music profession today. He likened the process of building a career to the way a child would build an imaginary world from Legos in various and diverse ways: "All of our Legos look the same. We all learn Klose scales, Mozart and excerpts, but the way we use them to build and rebuild ourselves is unique."

Adam Berkowitz, adjunct faculty member at the Hartt School Community Division, built on this idea by emphasizing that the way entrepreneurship is pursued is similar to the way we build our musicianship. During his "Entrepreneurship by Design" lecture he advised breaking ideas into smaller, more manageable parts and improving upon them until they are ready to be rebuilt and our ideas fully realized. Ultimately, Berkowitz explained, you analyze your skills to inform decisions on projects, then design a short-term and long-term plan to accomplish them. These plans should be applicable not only to your musical and business savvy but the overall brand and environment where you are creating your name.

Period clarinet specialist Thomas Carroll discussed his unique entrepreneurial path during his lecture on historical and replica instruments. Carroll has made a secondary career from building historical clarinets for historically informed performance ensembles, all stemming from his interest in instrument mechanics and acoustics.

Many of the workshops emphasized that in addition to finding your passions whether it be historical clarinets, forming a chamber ensemble, establishing a private studio, an academy, etc., there are logistics that must be thought through in order to be realized. This can come in the form of designing and implementing a marketing strategy, publicity materials, designing a concert series, radio exposure, performing in showcases, grant writing, navigating so-

cial media successfully, etc.

This was echoed in several workshops, especially the panel discussion on teaching entrepreneurship with John Reeks (bass clarinetist with the Louisiana Philharmonic and Loyola University professor), Jeff Anderle (San Francisco Conservatory of Music professor and versatile bass clarinetist/clarinetist), Kliment Krylovskiy (co-founder of the Zodiac Academy and Festival and clarinetist of the Zodiac Trio), Sean Osborn (former principal of the Metropolitan Opera) and Lisa Canning, owner and founder of Lisa's Clarinet Shop.

Several chamber musicians stressed the importance of educational and community endeavors when pursuing performance objectives. Krylovskiy in particular stressed the importance of having a strategy for education to improve an ensemble's chance of being selected to perform at festivals or residencies. He stated that it is often the final deciding factor for these opportunities.

Barbara Hankins and the Licorice Allsorts Clarinet Quartet later addressed the power of developing educational programming to build audiences and connect with young people through music. For some, education is overlooked when seeking "purely artistic" endeavors, but to help an inexperienced audience sense the value of music is compelling—captivating your audience and ensuring they age with you.

On several occasions presenters addressed that despite deep planning, strategy and overall thoughtfulness, sometimes our goals are not realized, at least not at first. This is something everyone in business must face. Even highly successful businessmen have experienced incredible setbacks while pursuing their passions. Lisa Canning articulated how sometimes abandoning projects or receiving the dreaded "no's" are a necessary part of the entrepreneurial process. In business, "failure" happens but recovery is more important than grant refusal or folded projects. Just as when we perform, failure (or shortcomings) are simply a part of the learning process.

Performances

Opening Board Recital

On July 29 at noon the opening recital by members of the I.C.A. board began with an address by Lisa Canning. Her words urged musicians to "be a beginner...be vulnerable...[embrace] new thoughts." Can-

ning emphasized that all clarinetists have multiple gifts, and the musical medium is not just for performers but also for inventors, businessmen and women, teachers and advocates. She encouraged musicians to be ambassadors for the arts and help preserve our artistic heritage.

Following the address, we heard from John Cipolla, current I.C.A. president and the festival's first performer. He performed *The Voice of the Onion* by Kenneth Berger, assisted by Zachary Lopes on piano. The unity in their *tutti* passages was full of color, accentuating the jazz overtones within Berger's work.

Immediately following, I.C.A. secretary Caroline Hartig took stage, lightening the mood with a small anecdote before performing Carlo Pedini's *L'Acciarino Di Weber per clarinetto solo*. Her lines were fluid and her presence commanded attention. The audience was so delighted with her execution that premature applause interrupted the final phrase of playful flourishes.

Next, I.C.A. treasurer Tod Kerstetter took the stage with bass clarinet in hand to play Roger Jannotta's transcription of *Improvisation on "God Bless the Child"* by Eric Dolphy. Kerstetter captured the thrill and nuance of improvisation with his fluid technique and raucous interjections of strength and power.

Revisiting more traditional roots, Donald Oehler (clarinet), Keith Koons (basset horn) and Seong Eun Kim (piano) presented their interpretation of *Concertpiece No. 2 in D Minor* by Felix Mendelssohn. This work has been arranged for many instrumentations, but it was refreshing to hear the piece brought back to its origins, showing the depth, color and flexibility of the basset horn.

The Sapphire Trio (clarinetist and I.C.A. president-elect Maxine Ramey, violinist Margaret Baldrige and pianist Jody Graves) then performed the first movement of *Serenade for Three* by Peter Schickele. Pristine in execution, the trio's performance was notable for its communicative power and ease of collaboration.

The recital ended with *Bagatelle for Solo Clarinet (2004)* by Alexei Pavlyuchuk performed by Stephan Vermeersch. The frenetic work was full of excitement and fire, making the percussive and punctuated slap tongue of the final note seem misplaced, yet strikingly satisfying in the textural juxtaposition. The diversity of instrumenta-

tions and styles represented on the opening recital was a perfect start for this conference focusing on musical entrepreneurship.

D'Addario Woodwinds Evening Concert

The first day of ClarinetFest® came to a boisterous conclusion with displays of artistry and athleticism from performers in the D'Addario Woodwinds Evening Concert. Todd Cope began the recital with an intimate performance of Prokofiev's *Overture on Hebrew Themes* assisted by members of the Ritz Chamber Orchestra. The sensitivity in his phrasing and beckoning of his piano dynamics captivated the audience, enrapturing the senses with his tone and dynamism.

Following Cope, Julien Hervé flawlessly captured the mysterious mood of Penderecki's *Sinfonietta No. 2* with equal parts depth and direction. The basses and soloists of the full Ritz Chamber Orchestra led by David Hattner expertly followed Hervé's lead and supported the expansiveness of his sound and interpretive subtleties.

In a drastic turn of style, Joseph Eller captured our attention with his first note, a pointed and clear altissimo. His svelte tone whirled around the playful melodies and lush harmonies of Ferruccio Busoni's *Concertino* with expert ease and conviction. After a brief intermission, Julian Bliss enlightened the audience with his knowledge and understanding of Finzi's *Concerto for Clarinet & String Orchestra*. Drawing from interactions with Finzi's son and a first-hand look at his writing studio, Bliss constructed a lovely and polished performance.

One of the unique features of ClarinetFest® 2014 was that performances often featured brief interviews with the performers. During this concert, Lisa Canning interviewed Julia Heinen, who displayed her humor and candor to the audience. Then the music continued with Heinen's performance of Scott McAllister's *Black Dog*. Her virtuosity and raucous, guitar-like imitations were displayed in bends, growls, and glissandi.

The evening came to a close with a duet by Julian Bliss and Julien Hervé. Their U.S. premiere of Krystof Maratka's *Csardas No. 4 for Two Clarinets and String Orchestra* left the audience thrilled with their folk-stylings of Maratka's dance-inspired work. After an encore performance displaying their virtuosic range, technical facility and speed,

the recital came to a close.

A Night of Jazz

Thursday, July 30 marked the end of ClarinetFest®'s second full day with a marathon concert full of true charm. The evening started with several tunes by local kings of New Orleans jazz, Evan Christopher and Gregory Agid, assisted by local musicians Tom Mitchell (guitar), John Previti (bass), Troy Davis (drums) and Willis Delony (piano). Christopher and Agid shared several standards and originals, displaying their mastery and furthering their reputations as local legends. Christopher opened the evening by introducing charts ("Blues in the Air" and "Banjo Noir") by pioneers of New Orleans clarinet Sidney Bechet and Alvin Batiste.

The performers' excitement was infectious. Solos were passed between the featured guests and supporting musicians, and whoops and hollers filled the room from musicians and the audience members alike. As Christopher led tunes "La Ciudad Criolla," "Tandé' Sak Fe Loraj Gwonde" and "Waltz for All Souls," his control, originality, and playful personality shone as bright as a full moon on the Mississippi at night. When Agid's tunes "Summer's Song" (dedicated to a young student of his who passed away) and "Swag" were performed, his bag of tricks revealed greater depth than the crowd could have hoped. In the final number of the first half, Harry Skoler and Felix Peikli joined Agid and Christopher for a jazz clarinet quartet arrangement of "The Mooche" by Duke Ellington. The room's applause hardly ceased.

Nearly an hour and a half into the night's performance, Peikli and Skoler took the stage despite a fatigued and fading crowd. Skoler, a consummate gentleman, played with an old school swagger reminiscent of New Orleans traditions. As Peikli followed, we heard his compositional chops with "Nocturnal," a sensitive and moving ballad revealing that this young musician of 24 has more than incredible technique and seemingly natural instincts. In his last numbers, Peikli's technical mastery was unleashed in full force with an unaccompanied improvisation on Gershwin's "Summertime" which transitioned into Grolnick's "Nothing Personal."

It would be remiss not to mention the incredible presence and talents of the as-

sisting musicians. The fineness of Delony and the raw power of drummer Troy Davis drove the massive force of the ensemble allowing guitar John Previti and bass Tom Mitchell to outline subtle harmonies and nuances.

In the final moments of the evening, Peikli, Skoler and Agid were joined on stage by John Cipolla for a jam on the blues chart "Ain't Misbehavin'." A true master of all styles, Cipolla led the jam, making every lick seem organic and fluid. Both exhausted and refreshed, the remaining audience approached the stage afterwards for congratulations, autographs and the satisfaction of meeting these wonderful musicians and personalities.

Vandoren Chamber Music Night

The following evening was a night of clarinet chamber music with masterpieces ranging from Mozart to Mandat. Master Sergeant Reis McCullough opened the concert with Spohr's *Fantasy and Variations on a Theme of Danzi*, Op. 81 assisted by the Ritz Chamber Players, violinists Kelly Hall-Tompkins and Kyle Lombard, violist Richard Brice and cellist Tahirah Whittington. His lively and bubbly tone gave the concert an invigorating start. Starkly contrasting in every way, Chris Pell changed the tone of the evening with Eric Mandat's *2 teez*. The energy in this piece captured the audience's attention as the fragmented lines danced through the ensemble, all musicians playing with excitement and vigor.

Ending the first half of the evening, D. Ray McClellan performed Brahms' *Quintet in B Minor for Clarinet and String Quartet*, Op. 115, bringing the focus back to more familiar standards. His tone and legato were smooth and seamless, and with sensitivity to match, the intimacy of the performance lingered throughout the night. Next, Jon Manasse performed Crusell's *Quartet for Clarinet and Strings in E-flat Major*, Op. 2, No. 1. With frequent quips and laughter between Manasse and the Ritz Chamber Players, the audience enjoyed this performance from a clarinetist who never disappoints.

In a world premiere, Piero Vincenti performed Claudio De Siena's *Italian Movies for Clarinets* (E-flat, B-flat and G clarinets). With quotes from *The Godfather* and rich Italian harmonies, the sweetness of Vincenti's playing was a great compliment to

a concert of established standards. Continuing with Italian works, Henry Jones (piano) and Philippe Cuper (clarinet) gave a superb performance of Carlo Della Giacomini's *Cavaleria Rusticana Fantasia*. Cuper played with excitement and fire, inspiring technical facility, and with a sweet thickness to his tone.

Ending the concert with Mozart's *Quintet for Strings in A Major*, K. 581, Pascual Martinez Forteza gave a sensitive and evocative performance. His personality sparkled with each phrase, leading the audience through Mozart with ease.

Buffet Crampon Gala Concert

On Saturday, the final evening, the audience enjoyed incredible works for clarinet with the assistance of The Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra and maestro David Hattner at the Buffet Crampon Gala Concert. Alcides Rodriguez and Gabor Varga give a jovial opening to the concert playing Krommer's *Concerto for Two Clarinets and Orchestra*, Op. 35. With bubbling lines and a beautiful blend, the duo played with poise and grace. The two clarinetists displayed great sensitivity throughout the second movement, playing with great control and intonation over a subdued Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra.

Next was Ralph Skiano with his poignant interpretation of Debussy's *Première Rhapsodie*. The clarinet weaved its way in and around the orchestra with incredible ease, wafting through elongated phrases and impish flourishes. In these moments the interplay between soloist and the orchestra's principal winds was delightful.

Gregory Raden then took the stage to perform Weber's *Concerto No. 1*. His first note stilled the room with his pure sound floating high above the orchestra. The third movement was lively with delicate inflections and a variety of colors which made for a lovely contrast between themes.

Antônio Saiote gave a lively performance of Canongia's *Clarinet Concert No. 3 in E-flat*. With wild technical demands, Saiote took command of the stage and played with abandon. Taking some artistic license, his virtuosic performance of Canongia's work was a memorable performance from the night.

In a last-minute change of performers, Robert DiLutis took the stage, in place of the programmed David Drosinos, to per-

form Ben-Haim's *Pastoral Variée for Clarinet, Harp and Strings*. A consummate professional and profound musician, no one would have known he was not the originally programmed artist. In many respects, it was the most impressive performance of the evening.

A full, lush string section cued the start of Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto*, the final piece of the evening. Paul Cigan delivered an inspiring performance of our cornerstone work, with delicate piano dynamics creating intimate moments of repose.

In Closing

With inspiring concerts and recitals throughout each day, ClarinetFest® attendees were constantly reminded of the fierce dedication and the excellent musicianship of clarinetists at the top of the profession. The lectures and workshops supplemented these musical offerings by showing that, in addition to being talented and hardworking, today's musicians must embrace an entrepreneurial spirit, continually seeking new ways to build their career and ensure a successful future. [Please refer to <http://clarinetfest.wordpress.com> to read full reports on more than 100 of the scheduled events.]

About the writer...

Melissa Morales is a master's student at DePaul University studying with Julie DeRoche and Larry Combs. She currently teaches at The People's Music School and performs with The Candid Concert Opera's Orchestra Nova and the Chicago Symphonic Winds of which she is also a founding member.