

Nova Notes

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF MUZIKO NOVA
- Covering contemporary music news at St. Olaf College -

Fall 2004 / Volume 3 #1

New comp professor balances beginnings

by Carl Schroeder '05

For Justin Merritt, St. Olaf's new Assistant Professor of Music Theory and Composition, the fall of 2004 is a time of professional and personal beginnings. In addition to assuming duties teaching sections of Ear Training, Theory and Instrumentation, he is also the proud father of a new son, Cullen Fang Ouxiang Merritt, born September 9. "That was the first day I was supposed to teach," said Merritt, "and we spent it at the hospital instead!"



Prof. Justin Merritt

Merritt's arrival follows the departure of Theory/Composition Professor Peter Hamlin, who left St. Olaf last spring to accept a position at his alma mater, Vermont's Middlebury College.

So far, Merritt is enjoying life in Northfield and teaching at St. Olaf. "Northfield is such a special, interesting place," he said. "I'm just loving being around so many talented musicians and bright people." Merritt hopes to bring several new ideas to the St. Olaf Music Department, such as an interdisciplinary project giving composers the opportunity to work with singers and create short lyrical theater productions.

Merritt's interest in music composition dates back to the age of seven, when he wrote a piano composition that won a local competition. "Of course," he observed, "it was fifteen years before I won anything else!"

The time gap between Merritt's awards quickly shrank. In 2000, he became the youngest-ever winner of the ASCAP Foundation/Rudolph Nissim Award for his orchestral composition *Janus Mask*. By the time he earned a Doctorate in Music Com-

Merritt continued on page 2

St. Olaf Band to perform award-winning Renk work

by Carl Schroeder '05

On November 13, 2004, the St. Olaf Band will perform *Metropolis Dawn*, a new six-minute work for band by St. Olaf Senior Christopher Renk.

Dawn, which was named the winner of the inaugural Caltech-Western Composition Contest last January, is a programmatic work that centers around the 1930-31 construction of New York's Empire State Building. Renk describes the piece as a "symphonic poem" inspired in part by the famous series of photographs by Lewis Wickes Hine of the skyscraper's construction.

Metropolis Dawn will be performed as part of the Festival of Bands concert at 4pm on November 13 in Skoglund Center Auditorium, which will also feature a guest conducting appearance by composer Mark Camphouse [see sidebar on page 2].



New York's Empire State Building, circa 1931.

• To listen to a reading session recording of *Metropolis Dawn*, visit Renk's website at www.stolaf.edu/people/renk.

INSIDE . . .

Recommended reading . . . 2

Composers on Composing for Band, edited by composer Mark Camphouse, offers observations and tips from 11 of today's top band composers.

Music from the Hill 2005 . . . 2

How to get involved in the next St. Olaf student composition CD project.

Alumnus shares advice . . . 3

1999 St. Olaf graduate Joshua Lund held a question and answer session and shared recordings of his music with students on October 8.

New music calendar . . . 3

Upcoming new music events at St. Olaf and in the Twin Cities area.

Q&A with Dale Warland . . . 4

Composer/conductor Dale Warland, a 1953 St. Olaf graduate, answers questions in excerpts from a recent interview with ComposersOnline.org.

Nova Notes is a quarterly publication of Muziko Nova, the official student-run contemporary music organization of St. Olaf College.

To contribute an article, feedback or ideas, email novanotes@stolaf.edu.



New composition professor balances beginnings

Merritt continued from page 1

position from Indiana University in May 2003, Merritt had earned an impressive array of national and regional awards in music composition.

Merritt believes that the ability to adapt musically from project to project is one key to success for today's composers. "Most of my teachers came from an age when it was important that you belong to a particular school of composition," said Merritt. "Today, it's far more wide open."

True to his philosophy, Merritt's compositional portfolio includes a wide variety of instrumental and vocal works for large and chamber ensembles, written in many compositional styles. In addition, he also has an interest in electronic music, and will be teaching a course in Electronic Music during this year's Interim.

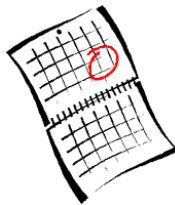
St. Olaf students and faculty will have many opportunities to hear Merritt's compositions in coming years. A recital of his chamber music is scheduled for February 18, 2005, and he is currently writing a piece for the St. Olaf Band slated for performance during the 2005-06 school year.

As Merritt balances his personal and professional beginnings, he is clearly in the process of composing his future plans.

Although his current contract is for just two years, Merritt hopes to spend much longer than that at St. Olaf, joking that tentative plans are in the works for his retirement party in Ytterboe Hall in the year 2050.

- Justin Merritt's website is online at www.stolaf.edu/people/merritt.

Mark Your Calendar



Justin Merritt's Works in Recital

Performed by St.
Olaf students and
music faculty

**February 18, 2005
7pm • Urness Recital Hall**

Recommended Reading

Composers on Composing for Band Mark Camhouse, editor

A must-read for anyone interested in the present and future of concert band music, *Composers on Composing for Band* gives fresh insight and perspective into the world of music from eleven of today's top band composers, including Timothy Mahr, David Gillingham, Karel Husa, James Barnes and Frank Ticheli.

Conceived and edited by composer-conductor Prof. Mark Camhouse, who will be visiting St. Olaf for the November 13 Festival of Bands concert, this unique yet practical book delves into the composer's world, with unique perspectives on the creative process, commissioning new works, orchestration, the art of teaching composition and the future of the wind band.

Visit www.giamusic.com for more information or to order the book, or check out the St. Olaf Music Library's copy.

Nova Notes

Carl Schroeder, editor

Muziko Nova officers

Carl Schroeder, President

Matthew Peterson, Vice President

Amy Jacobson, Secretary

Michael Bloem, Treasurer

E-mail: novanotes@stolaf.edu

Web site: <http://www.stolaf.edu/orgs/nova>

Nova Notes is a publication of Muziko Nova, an official St. Olaf student organization dedicated to contemporary music. Nova Notes is published three times per school year, in October, January and April. To receive Nova Notes free by e-mail, send a request to schroedc@stolaf.edu.

To join the Muziko Nova alias, send an email to schroedc@stolaf.edu.

Music from the Hill 2005

Get your music on the next student composers CD

Music from the Hill is a bi-annual collection of music by St. Olaf student composers released by Muziko Nova. The next edition will be released in April 2005, and submissions will be accepted from November 2004 to February 2005.

The project funding, generously provided by St. Olaf's Finstad Office for Entrepreneurial Studies, allows St. Olaf music majors and anyone who has taken a composition class to have one composition recorded and mastered by current student audio engineer Joshua Wyatt. and considered for inclusion on *Music from the Hill 2005*.

Download and print an interest form at www.musicfromthehill.com or e-mail project director Carl Schroeder at schroedc@stolaf.edu if you are interested in participating in the Music from the Hill project.



The first release in the series is *Music from the Hill 2003*, a collection of new music by St. Olaf student composers released by Muziko Nova in February 2003. It features nineteen tracks of new instrumental, vocal, jazz and electronic music written and performed by St. Olaf students. Visit www.musicfromthehill.com for more details, or check out the St. Olaf Music Library's copy.

Composer alum shares music, advice

Joshua Lund '99 visits Muziko Nova

by Nicole Vettraino '07

Composer, teacher and St. Olaf alumnus Josh Lund '99 held an informative lecture on Oct. 8 for a small gathering of theory/composition majors in Christiansen Hall of Music. Lund recounted his experiences as a St. Olaf student, shared a few recordings of his original music and encouraged the theory/composition majors to be prepared for a hard but rewarding road after college.

Initially, Lund considered going into music education, but after seeing "Mr. Holland's Opus," he opted for the theory/composition major so that he would have ample time to compose.

"I have a soundtrack going on in my head twenty-four seven," Lund said. "If I didn't have time to put that down on paper, I would go mad."

Lund attended graduate school at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Ill., and received his master's degree in 2001. After graduate school, Lund was a substitute teacher, held a teaching position at a preparatory school in Elgin, Ill., and briefly worked for a credit card printing company before landing a teaching position at William Penn University in Oskalooska, Iowa. He hopes to pursue a doctoral degree sometime in the future.

Lund began his lecture by playing some of his original compositions. The first, a piece for piano entitled *Aged*, wove a unique melody that got progressively more complex with a two-note ostinato. Lund explained that the piece exemplified the moments when self-reflection led him to the realization that he had grown or "aged" in some way.



Composer Joshua Lund

Following *Aged*, Lund played a recording of a string quartet, the first movement of which he had written while attending St. Olaf. Lund's creativity with rhythm and form stood out in his string movements. During one movement in particular, the melodic motifs in each instrument progressively sped up until halfway through the piece. Then, Lund literally took a mirror image of all the material up to that point, inverted it so that in the end, his movements slow back down.

Lund spoke openly about his mentality regarding composition. He encouraged students to love their music, because he pointed out that it is not worth it for a composer to put a single note on paper if he does not like it. Moreover, Lund explained how he is still forming his compositional style; with every piece he writes, he is approaching his own true and unique composition style.

"I'll know when I've found [my own unique composition style] when I can write a piece of music that I can listen to over and over again, for the rest of my life," Lund said.

Lund also gave specific advice to student composers. As far as what to do after college, he admitted that a decision to go to graduate school was a "matter of personal choice." At the same time, he said it is good to start making connections with the gurus of the composition world right away.

Regarding composition competitions, Lund suggested students "enter everything [they] can." Lund said that even small competitions are good, because the winners are getting exposure to publishers and important people in the composition world.

Lund left his audience with several words of wisdom. "Never throw anything out," he said. "Be a compositional packrat — you never know when you might be able to use something in a future work."

He went on to explain that composition can be inspired anywhere and at any time. Lund should know; like a true artist, he has a small book of manuscript paper in the glove compartment of his car and on the nightstand by his bed — just in case inspiration strikes.

New Music Calendar

*Upcoming new music events
at St. Olaf College*

October 29, 2004 — Muziko Nova Fall Student Composer Roundtable (8:00 pm, Ytterboe Pod 312)

November 1, 2004 — Recital by Sara Davis Buechner, composer and classical pianist (8:00 pm, Urness Recital Hall)

November 5, 2004 — St. Olaf Orchestra performs *Sola Gratia* by Steve Amundson and other works (8:00 pm, Skoglund Center Auditorium)

November 6, 2004 — "Songwriting & Self Discovery," a lecture by Helen Nienhaus Barba '81 (7:30 pm, Urness Recital Hall)

November 12, 2004 — Composer Mark Camphouse gives an open lecture on his compositional process (2:00 pm, Christiansen Hall of Music classroom 232)

November 13, 2004 — St. Olaf Band performs *Metropolis Dawn* by Christopher Renk '05 and other works (4:00 pm, Skoglund Center Auditorium)

November 21, 2004 — St. Olaf Philharmonia performs "The Minnesota Portraits" by Carl Schroeder '05 and other works (Boe Chapel, 4:30pm)

December 9, 2004 — Student Composition Recital (9:00 pm, Urness Recital Hall)

February 18, 2005 — Faculty Composition Recital (7:00 pm, Urness Recital Hall)

April 5, 2005 — Music from the Hill 2005 CD Release Event (8:15pm, Christiansen Hall of Music Orchestra Room)

For more information on these and other new music events, visit the online calendar:

www.stolaf.edu/orgs/nova/events.html

Q&A with composer/conductor Dale Warland

Excerpts from an interview with ComposersOnline.org, conducted by Abbie Betinis '01

As founder and conductor of the internationally acclaimed Dale Warland Singers, 1953 St. Olaf graduate Dale Warland is said to have rejuvenated the choral genre by focusing largely on commissioning new music. Over the past 31 years, he has commissioned over 270 new choral works from more than 150 composers, including Dominick Argento, Libby Larsen, Stephen Paulus, Mary Ellen Childs and Eric Whitacre.

Below are excerpts from an interview with Warland originally published by ComposersOnline, a monthly online new music magazine. The interview was conducted by 2001 St. Olaf graduate Abbie Betinis, a composer and former Dale Warland Singers member.



Composer Dale Warland

Q. From your unique perspective on the current state of choral music, are there any modern compositional trends that you see going on right now?

A. Every composer that I encounter seems to develop his or her own voice, which is great. But I would say that harmony seems to take more interest right now than rhythm, per se. There is, in terms of harmony, what I call a “cluster binge” going on. But the music itself is often very stagnant as far as a sense of flow or motion because rhythm has become secondary. Composers and choirs in this country I think are really – and I’m talking about this country – are much more limited, or are making themselves much more limited in their use of anything but very simple rhythms and meters.

Q. Is there a way around that for the emerging composer?

A. I think there is. There’s no question, there’s a big need for simple, effective choral music, but I think that’s a great challenge for composers – to learn how to write for the masses, but still with a fresh voice. And that’s not easy, that’s not easy at all. But with a little bit of effort, combined with good imagination, of course, I think we could fill that need without “writing down.”

Q. You’ve brought a lot of high-quality music into the world by commissioning over 270 new choral works for the Dale Warland Singers. How do you “discover” these often young, emerging composers?

A. Well, [Stephen Paulus] was a student at Macalester [College] when I first came there. He was at Macalester only two years, and then transferred to the University of Minnesota. But I knew his interest in writing and I just had a habit of just asking people to do things if I saw talent. Steve was one of those people. After he transferred to the University, we were at a concert together, and it was almost spontaneous, the whole idea. I just asked him if he would write a piece for the Macalester Concert Choir. I think we were going overseas the next year. That was the very first commission he’d ever received. Of course he took to it and delivered, and since then we’ve commissioned some forty pieces over the years.

Q. What is it like to conduct your own work?

A. Well, it’s always such a surprise to hear how the music actually sounds after you’ve written it! It’s pretty much the same for me to conduct my own piece as anyone else’s. I work out all the breaths and the divisi like I do for any piece. But I always worry about people liking something, or it being effective. So I think I just need to do more, and shake loose.

Q. As a conductor who has actively sought new choral music, can you recommend places for composers to market and promote their choral compositions?

A. Always start with what you have. A composer should actively talk to conductors and get recommendations. Just ask people, “Do you know anybody who conducts a high school choir who would be interested in new music?” Then you make sure to tell that director who sent you to them. Then, send out your music and see what happens. Also, only send good dubs... no bad recordings.

The best promotion is always word-of-mouth, and I’d start with people I know: “So-and-so said you might be interested in this particular piece.” Or if you’ve heard their choir, that’s good too. But never put pressure on anyone.

The dos and don’ts of promotion are very important. There are some composers who just bug you so much you don’t want to have anything to do with them. And there are certain things to remember to do when you do have a performance by a conductor and choir – like thanking them. There are some composers I simply won’t perform because I don’t want to work with them. They’re obnoxious.

Q. Obnoxious in the promotion of their music?

A. Yes! [Laughs] Of their music, and of themselves!

Q. Do you have any final advice for composers?

A. I would tell any young composer: Go for it now. Don’t wait. Don’t say, “Well I’m going to do that when I have time.” Keep the writing going, and let everything be in a mess if it’s in a mess. Just don’t stop.

If someone is interested in your work, for goodness sake, respond! Respond to conductors and to all inquiries. Respond on time, show up on time, deliver on time... these things are crucial.

I think you’ll have much more confidence, and persistence, and your imagination will “fly” more if you don’t communicate exclusively with other composers, but stimulate your imagination by talking to playwrights and going to plays, by going to dance and theater, by reading books, seeing movies...

You can catch yourself, I think, in just being too caught up in competition. Just go your own way and enjoy it.

• Visit www.ComposersOnline.org to read the entire interview.