

Noteworthy

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SILVER STRINGS ORCHESTRA – A 37-YEAR LEGACY OF MUSIC



By Angela Smith

The Silver Strings Orchestra has been providing music to the Austin community since 1983, but the idea for the group was born 30 years earlier when a group of Austin schoolteachers formed a string ensemble to play music together.

As the teachers began retiring, the group fell in numbers and eventually disbanded. The leader and arranger of that group, J.G. Perkins, realized that even though the group had dissolved, the desire to play and make music was still there. In November 1983 Perkins' dream for an ensemble that would practice and perform on a regular basis became reality. The new group took the name Silver Strings – a clever take on the color of most of its members' hair – those that still had some, that is.

The group, originally all retired schoolteachers, has expanded over the years and is now comprised of both retirees and working persons representing a wide variety of ages, occupations, and backgrounds. The group still includes former and current teachers, but the roster of players through the years has boasted attorneys, authors, high tech specialists, medical professionals, and graphic artists. One former musician in the group was a research lab employee who was involved in dismantling and analyzing enemy contraband during World War II.

Jean McDermott, one of the first Silver Strings members, was active with the group until this year. She recalled the ensemble originally met and rehearsed at Perkins' house. Perkins' wife Martha kept the musicians happy with a plentiful supply of food and drink. As the group grew larger, they began rehearsing at Westminster Manor.

Today Silver Strings rehearses at the Chapel on Austin State Hospital grounds. They perform each Monday during the fall and spring semester at a different venue: retirement complexes, nursing homes, rehab centers, churches and synagogues, and hospital groups. The repertoire includes mostly popular melodies and classic show tunes. Players represent all string groups -- violin, viola, cello, and bass -- with piano accompaniment by Carolyn McColloch. One member, Pat Yingst, plays the flute.

Over the years the group has had four directors or concert masters. The first director Perkins was followed by Glenn Roark, a violinist and retired psychiatrist who worked with UT Health Services. He died in 2011.

His successor was Catherine van Zanten who led the group starting in 2010 until the 2019-2020 season when she retired for health reasons – hers and her husband's. Katie Kerwin has now stepped into the leadership position.

Van Zanten said she sees the mission of Silver Strings as serving the community with the music it provides and connecting players and the community. "The orchestra has become a close-knit group of people who care about each other and love playing together," she said. "I think the orchestra has evolved into a more autonomous group of people who work well together and sound better and better."

Silver Strings current leader Kerwin said, "The Silver Strings are an amazing community of people who come together to make music for sharing with seniors. Our group is the only group in town to accept any level of instrumentalist. We have a grand time with fellowship and music making merriment."

The group has traditionally ended its concerts with the song "Happy Trails" by Dale Evans. For all who have played in the orchestra and the thousands who have had an opportunity to hear it over the last 37 years, the trail has been a happy one indeed.

Editors: Marie White, Marcia Edwards, Elizabeth Lerner



President's Message

Sarah Harriman

After a marvelous program last week dedicated to NFMC Crusade for Strings, the Orientation Committee welcomed three of our new members: Sandra Lawell, Karen Millican and Mollie Tower. Unfortunately our other new members--Linda Piefer, Lois Armor, Katie Flahive, Charlotte Andrezik, and Carol Dewar--could not attend. I hope you will take the opportunity to introduce yourself and make each of them feel welcome.

I was musing about how these new members happened to decide to join us. In the past I expect our club took advantage of newspaper listings to advertise our meetings, but that no longer happens. More recently we've taken advantage of KMFA's events listing, but soon that will no longer happen. How do we continue to promote our club in the future? Listing in concert programs is one way, but we can't depend just on that. We have a great organization, and we need to figure out how best to share that. I was recently at a concert and chatted with a woman I had never met before but who said she was volunteering at KMFA. I took the opportunity to invite her to a meeting. What if we all committed to talk to one person when we attend a musical event and invite them to attend one of our meetings? That would be a very effective way to promote our organization and get new members at the same time. Let's try it...

I'm not a mathematician so the Fibonacci Sequence is something I've only heard of. However, I watched a youtube video which relates the sequence to music and I found it very interesting. Hope you will too. Here's the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=share&v=IGJeGOW8TzQ&app=desktop>

Visit Museums . . . Live Longer?
A new study from the University College London found that adults aged 50 or older who visited museums or other cultural spaces every few months had a 31 percent lower risk of early death. The statistic is based on responses and data from 6,710 adults.

Visit Museums . . . Live Longer?

The study accounted for socioeconomic status, recognizing that longevity may be linked to the higher status of the demographic of these audiences, and found that the correlation remained. Arts engagement was found to help alleviate stress and depression, reduce loneliness, support cognitive function, and promote empathy, social perception, and emotional intelligence.

This study is part of a growing body of research that links the arts to positive health outcomes. Artwork in hospitals is now linked to improved patient experience; in Canada, doctors can prescribe free, health-enhancing visits to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

(Women in the Arts, Winter/Spring 2020)

Sotto Voce

The poet is Benjamin Pehr (long-time resident of Austin, where he received his education at U.T.)

Do you hear the music?
You, the classical musician...
Do not turn a deaf ear.
It is the music of my love:
My love for you, for you alone.
It is not a piano solo.
It is not a chamber quartet.
It is a magnificent symphony
Composed by my heart, of themes within my soul.
Turn your good ear this way, do you hear it now?
The notes are my thoughts,
The tones are my emotions.
The melodies are my missives, musings,
The myriad musical messages in the nights.
The movements are our times together:
The meetings at cafes, at restaurants,
The walks outdoors in parks,
The talks indoors at your table.
My joy is violins, do you hear them?
My compassion is cellos, do you hear them?
My melancholy, bassoons: can you hear them?
Your graceful smiles sound *adagio*;
Excitement to hold you: *allegro*;
Exhilaration of kisses: *scherzo*.
The want for closeness, to merge with you,
To join with you as music: *fugue*.
Now do you hear it? Listen.
I burn for you in *crescendo*,
I depart *diminuendo*.
Listen! Hear! It is beautiful,
This symphony of love for you.
The passion is played *forte*;
The tenderness: *pianissimo*;
The loneliness: *sotto voce*.

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Poetry Corner

Events Calendar

Austin Symphony Orchestra

March 6th & 7th at 8 p.m. (Dell Hall, The Long Center)
 March Madness: Music of Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Elgar & more
<https://thelongcenter.org/events-and-tickets/march-madness-music-of-chopin-tchaikovsky-elgar-more/>

Austin Classical Guitar

March 7th at 8 p.m. (AISD Performing Arts Center, 1500 Barbara Jordan Blvd., 78723)
 International Series: David Russell
<https://www.austinclassicalguitar.org/events/>

Broadway in Austin

March 11 – 22 Numerous Performances at Bass Concert Hall, 2300 Robert Dedman Drive
 Disney's *Aladdin*
<https://austin.broadway.com/>

Metropolitan Opera in HD

February 29th at 11:55 a.m. Various Movie Theaters
Agrippina (George Frideric Handel)
March 14th at 11:55 a.m. Various Movie Theaters
 Richard Wagner's *Der Fliegende Holländer*
<https://www.metopera.org/season/in-cinemas/>

Austin Classical Guitar

March 20th at 7 p.m. (Private home in Lakeway)
 Lakeway Upclose: Joseph Palmer in the Clifford/Lee Home
<https://www.austinclassicalguitar.org/events/>

Line Upon Line Percussion

March 22nd at 8 p.m. (Location to be determined)
 TAK Ensemble (quintet)
<https://www.lineuponlinepercussion.org/master-event-list/2020/3/22/series-show-4-lul-presents-tak>

Austin Classical Guitar

March 22nd at 6 p.m. (Details at website)
 Upclose Georgetown: Joseph Palmer
<https://www.austinclassicalguitar.org/events/>

Blanton Art Museum

March 24th at 11:30, 12:30 and 1:30 (Blanton Art Museum, 200 E. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.)
 Bach in the Subway featuring viola player and UT Psychology Professor Michael Domjan
<https://blantonmuseum.org/exhibitions-calendar/events-calendar/>

Ballet Austin – The Austin Music Project

March 27th & 28th at 8 p.m. (The Long Center)
March 29th at 3 p.m.
 Live Music by Austin Chamber Music Center, Austin Classical Guitar & Tosca String Quartet
<https://balletaustin.org/performances/austin-music-project>

Austin Chamber Music

March 28th at 7:30 p.m. (First Unitarian Church, 4700 Grover)
 Beethoven and the Infinite with the Attacca Quartet and Michelle Schumann
<https://austinchambermusic.org/event/beethoven-the-infinite-synchronism/>

Texas Early Music Project

March 28th at 7:30 p.m. (St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, 8134 Mesa Drive)
March 29th at 3 p.m. (First Presbyterian Church, 8001 Mesa Drive)
 Ah Sweet Lady: Passion in Medieval France
<https://www.early-music.org/2019-2020-season>

Austin Opera

March 28th at 8 p.m. (Central Austin Library, 710 W. Cesar Chavez)
March 29th at 4 p.m.
 Opera ATX: Winter Journey
<https://austinopera.org/>

Austin Classical Guitar

March 29th 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. (Antone's, 305 E. 5th Street)
 FlamencoAustin: Grisha
<https://www.austinclassicalguitar.org/event/flamenco-austin-grisha/>

UT Butler School of Music

<https://music.utexas.edu/calendar>

Pops Concert Reception – April 1st – No Foolin'!

Starting at 9:30, please join your fellow WMMC members and guests in the First Unitarian Church Community Hall for a light snack and beverage prior to the Pops Concert.

Any bakers out there? Please consider bringing a batch of sweet or savory bite-size muffins to share. Hot tea, ice tea and coffee will be provided.

March 14	Der fliegende Holländer (Richard Wagner)
April 11	Tosca (Giacomo Puccini)
May 9	Maria Stuarda (Gaetano Donizetti)

