Greetings and Happy Spring!

Our latest newsletter features a variety of articles, reviews, concert announcements and other items of interest to the Alberta string community. From the runaway success of our ASA Honours Orchestra to our many music-related journeys hither and yon, our members have not been idle. In this issue, violin teachers will find an informative account of the celebrated Létourneau method by ASA Advisor Guillaume Tardif; also, I have the opportunity at last to share my experiences from the spectacular Amsterdam Cello Biennale!

2007 will be a busy year for the ASA. In addition to our various clinics and community outreach activities, we are planning a reprise of the ASA Honours Orchestra this fall at the University of Lethbridge, to run concurrently with the ASA string conference. Keep up to date by visiting our website, www.albertastringassociation.ca, and send us your thoughts about what you would like to see at this event: info@albertastringassociation.ca. We need your input!

Presiding over the Honours Orchestra weekend will be our newest board member, Tido Janssen, profiled in this issue. We look forward to working with Tido in preparation for this event, and we are most grateful for his initiative.

We have a strong membership this year; thank you all for your support! As members, you are entitled to advertise concerts and other string-related events for free in the newsletter, in a mailout to our membership, and on our website. Please include specific details: date, time, location, ticket price and a short bio of the performer(s) if desired.

I also invite you to send me a short description of your professional activities (teaching, performing, repair etc.) with a current picture, to post on the ASA website.

I look forward to communicating with you!

Josephine van Lier, President.
A workshop with Ernst Reijseger

October 27-November 4, 2006

For nine days in October, 2006, the “Muziekgebouw aan ‘t IJ,” Amsterdam’s world-class concert facility, was home to a large, happy family of cello enthusiasts: players, luthiers, and music lovers, all attending the Amsterdam Cello Biennale. In addition to a daily diet of concerts, masterclasses and workshops, the event featured a national cello competition and a unique collaboration of 12 Dutch luthiers—normally rather solitary people—shaving and shaping away to create a single cello.

Six days, six suites, six soloists

Six of the days begin with a genuine luxury: the opportunity to hear each of the Bach solo suites, performed by a different, leading artist, at 9:30 am sharp—the perfect incentive for everyone to get up early, and a wonderful way to set the tone for the rest of the day.

The range of interpretation across these six performances was, to say the least, remarkable. Suite #1 was performed by Anner Bijlsma, to many the “guru” of solo Bach. That Mr. Bijlsma seldom performs nowadays made this “guru” of solo Bach. That Mr. Bijlsma’s youthful (over)exuberance, flexibility, and good humour go a long way in masterclass; more than a few of us were put off by Wispelweij’s short temper, while Queyras’s youthful (over)exuberance was, by contrast, infectious. The most skilled clinicians—Carr, Bijlsma and Valter Despau—held the assembled crowd rapt, whether agreeing or not, with more than a few scribbling notes. These masterclasses left me regretting that I had not brought my cello, such were the quantity and quality of innovative ideas begging to be tried out.

A little kitchen music

Following each masterclass came one of my favourite parts of the day, nominally from 12:15 to 1 pm (but frequently longer): “Meetings with Anner Bijlsma”. These were informal, public chat sessions between Bijlsma and the other guest artists, loosely centering on “kitchen music”—the music you play for yourself, not on the podium. The discussions ranged from individual solutions to specific bowing problems, the advantages of this or that technique, favourite repertoire and so on. Disagreements and good-natured chiding were positively indulged, much to the delight and fascination of the audience. More important, we were literally peering into the practice rooms of these stellar performers and learning what they, after all, are human beings as well as Bijlsma memorably put it, “a cello makes you a very humble person: one night you have had a very successful concert and you feel you are the greatest cellist. The next morning you start and the first note you play sounds like shit!”

In the various workshops which occupied the afternoon, it seemed that every conceivable aspect of cello literature and technique was covered, from the latest theories on period performance to Ernst Reijseger’s litany of avant-garde, extended techniques (such as a squeal produced by rubbing moistened fingers across the face of the instrument, not recommended for Guadagnini owners).

Parade of artists

In a city as inviting and tourist-friendly as Amsterdam, the Biennale is a little peculiar—an event so completely packed with performances as to leave practically no time for seeing the sights—but nobody was complaining. Almost every day featured two full length concerts, at 4 and 8:30 pm. Some highlights included Israeli cellist Gavriel Lipkind, who may have set a new, land-speed record with his mercurial program of Martinu, Ligeti, Franck, Skrabin and Wieniawski. Colin Carr performed an inspirational, technically flawless “cellist’s program” of caprices by Piatti, Beethoven’s fifth sonata, the Debussy sonata and more, culminating in Popper’s virtuosic Slow Variations, which literally took every audience’s breath away.

The three solo suites of Benjamin Britten were performed by Piet Wispelweij in a single, tour de force afternoon concert—too much for some audience members, who left before the end, but a rare opportunity nonetheless to hear this cycle in its entirety, played by an artist with an obvious flair for the repertoire.

The evening concerts offered up all of our favourite cello ensemble combinations: the Bach Gamba sonatas performed by Gregor Horsch, with bayan accompaniment by Geir Draugflot—a delightful surprise—and a renaissance gamba quartet nosily offset by the avant-garde cellist, Ernst Reijseger. The cello octet Conunto Iberica, under the baton of Elias Aizenzukov, gave us all of our favourite cello ensemble pieces. The gala concert was another study in stark contrasts, featuring a typically muscular performance of the Shostakovich concertos by Russian cellist Natalia Gutman, alongside Jean-Guihen Queyras’s wonderfully lyrical, genial interpretation of the Haydn C major concerto.

The cello competition made for a very interesting backdrop to the festival, given that audience favourites generally found little favour with the jury, and vice versa. One of the central predicaments of competing lies in the difficulty of the “inner game,” already mastered by established artists. In the words of Anner Bijlsma, “There is nothing more difficult than playing a note that last four beats, on an open G-string...when $10,000 is at stake! And I know who will win it as well: some kid that has been practicing that one note for the past five years”.

For any cellist, to live and breathe the excitement and energy of the Amsterdam Biennale is beyond inspiring, beyond description. Thirteen thousand people came to the various events, many of us staying from 9:30 am to 11 pm, day after day, loath to miss even a single performance. To mingle with all of the performers, most of whom mixed casually with us; to connect with fellow cellists, discussing everything from repertoire, technique, and bowing to performing and teaching careers; to hear so many world-class performances in little over a week; these are the life- and career-defining moments to which all musicians look for strength and purpose. I most certainly hope to repeat the experience again in two years!

Josephine van Lier

Page 2

Amsterdam Cello Biennale cont’d

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Page 3
Claude Letourneau’s Guide Pédagogique
A detailed ‘how-to’ for the young violinist and teacher:

Claude Letourneau, now 82 years old, is still the driving force behind the successful ‘Méthode Letourneau’, a pedagogical approach taught for more than 40 years, mostly in the province of Quebec, but also in many French-speaking countries. Mr. Letourneau continues to teach privately at all levels, and only recently did he retire from the Conservatoire in Quebec City. Mr. Letourneau was my first violin teacher, and a man who played an important role in my musical development. I recall many times through heavy snow banks, hand-in-hand with my grandfather, to our ‘double violin lessons’ with Mr. Letourneau, the authoritative teacher, whose charm and ease with children was always evident, called us his ‘youngest and oldest students’. Later, at the Conservatoire, my fellow students and I respected him very much, always trying hard to please him at juries.

Owing to his pedagogical efforts, Mr. Letourneau’s influence has extended far beyond his own pupils. According to his publisher’s website “more than 300 teachers initiated to the Letourneau Method have allowed more than 40,000 children and adults to reap its benefits.” As one of those many beneficiaries, I vividly recall a large celebration which took place to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the publication of ‘Claude Letourneau’ and ‘Mouvement Vital’ (of which Mr. Letourneau was also founder and director), at the Grand Théâtre, Quebec’s largest venue. There were quite a few young violinists on stage – 2000 or so, it seemed – playing the familiar traditional tunes in rank and file. The large venue was packed to his direction. I was six or seven years old, small enough to enjoy the privilege of the first row. At the end of the concert, myriad colorful balloons fell on our excited heads and instruments, and our parents beamed with pride. For so many of us who participated, these glorious memories now give Mr. Letourneau a larger-than-life aspect.

Mr. Letourneau trained primarily in Quebec City and continued his education in Paris and New York, studying with Galamian, Suzuki, and Roland, among others. He did not venture into the career of a concert violinist after Paris years, choosing instead to focus his immense intellectual and musical gifts on the development of an innovative method for training children and teachers. His many pedagogical books (exercises, grading arrangements and teacher manuals) are still in circulation in Quebec. Some of Mr. Letourneau’s best-known students include Émmanuelle Boisvert, concermaster of the Detroit Symphony, and Virginie Melanson, professor at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore.

ASA members will no doubt be fascinated by Mr. Letourneau’s methodology and philosophy. At a recent meeting in Quebec City, he himself described his recent Guide Pédagogique as “the work of a lifetime”. Clearly, the strength of his proposed curriculum draws from his long experience, as revealed in his richness of detail, from early steps to advanced musical development. Any teacher willing to follow his method finds a carefully designed schematic for the natural acquisition of skills, mostly in the form of interlinked games and continuous assessment through repertoire and drills. The pace of the method is designed to be adaptable to the individual student and progress is measured through many examinations. Guide Pédagogique’s most important sections are the lists of the MENTIONS and 1st Cycle, which correspond more or less to introductory and pre-university training; the 2nd and 3rd cycles are equivalent to the Bachelor’s and Master’s level repertoire.

I consider the following among the most interesting and valuable aspects of Mr. Letourneau’s method:

- A number of original and instantly appealing images and games are used to introduce technical concepts and routines. These images, easy to understand and to communicate, capitalize on the young pupil’s desire of play and build an idiom which links young violinists together. Such issues as touch, balance, tone, resonance, rhythm, placement and manipulation are thus addressed and conceptualized in an accessible way.

- A central principle of Mr. Letourneau’s Méthode Élémentaire—a philosophy of Zoltán Kodály—is the memorization of traditional material from one’s own culture as a basis of primary musical education. This treasury, an essential companion of primary musical education. This treasury, an essential companion of primary musical education.

- The pace of the method is goal-directed and reinforced with positive feedback. Students having completed the MENTIONS are able to perform technical routines: plus a number of short pieces (traditional tunes, arrangements of Bach and Händel) in the first position; as well as demonstrated exercise rules with the basic major/minor finger groupings (extrahorizons), and some basic control over the full bow length, on the string and in mid-air; through exercises extending to the heel and tip.

- The Létourneau Method ideally takes place in a conservatory setting, wherein weekly lessons; sight-seeing and ensemble-playing; group exercises; and musicianship training (singing, theory, etc) are formally administered and supervised. Such an environment, united by the Létourneau spirit of careful and thoughtful guidance, promotes a sense of belonging to a community of like-minded peers. Family involvement is also encouraged; in my youth, there was always an enthusiastic volunteer corps of parents upon whom Mr. Létourneau was happy to rely.

- The First Cycle involves more keys and positions. Left-hand patterns up to and including 7th position are required from an early stage, together with a more intense focus on bow distribution and articulation. Particular attention is given to legato play and the development of a right-hand physiology.

- The Létourneau Method offers a wider array of repertoire for these First Cycle parts, using favourite intermediate standards (‘regular repertoire’) as basis for core training, and complementary repertoire and études to choose from as needed. He suggests that large portions of étude books should be covered thoroughly, starting with Hoffmann op.25 and Wolfhart op. 45; adding Kayser op.20, Léonard Petitie Gymnastique, Dont op.37, May various études brillantes et Études spéciales; and concluding with Kreutzer 1-14 (incidentally, I consider these opening Kreutzer études the most difficult, along with the most difficult études, along with the most difficult

- The Second Cycle, in 5 parts, requires the student to become adept in all keys, double-stops, harmonics, and bowings such as flying staccato, sautille, sallando, and the so-called ‘flying-bows.’ The repertoire is designed to develop a sense of that of a maturing young artist and (one that I also often teach in the first few years of the undergraduate level)- Mozart Sonatas, Spohr and Fiorillo, and Paganini. The educational function of this format for most teachers. The Pre-MENTIONS and 4 MENTIONS, a preparation for the 10 steps of the 1st cycle, make extensive use of ensemble sight-reading exercises. The pupil is thus provided with an invaluable opportunity to develop a sense of social collaboration and teamwork, and the pleasure of sharing and communication through music. I have deeply fond recollections of Mr. Létourneau’s group classes and concerts.

- By the completion of the MENTIONS, the pupil has assimilated a great deal of musicianship and basic training through the most natural means imaginable—singing, dancing, miming—each step having been laid out with perfect logic and deliberation. Frequent assessments are central to this process, ensuring that the pupil’s efforts are goal-directed and reinforced with positive feedback. Students having completed the MENTIONS are able to perform technical routines: plus a number of short pieces (traditional tunes, arrangements of Bach and Händel) in the first position; as well as demonstrated exercise rules with the basic major/minor finger groupings (extrahorizons), and some basic control over the full bow length, on the string and in mid-air; through exercises extending to the heel and tip.

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- Bach/E major concerto, Corelli/Follia, Sarasate/Zigeunerweisen; 2) De Beriot/Concerto Nr. 7, Ries/Perpetuum Mobile, Svenenden; Romance op.26; 3) Bach/First Partita, Brahms/2nd Hungarian Dance, Kabalevsky/Concerto; 4) Beethoven/Romance in F, Mozart/Concerto Nr. 3, Rimsky-Korsakov/Flight of the Bumble-Bee; 5) Consus/Concerto, Mozart/Adagio in E, Paganini/Perpetuum Mobile. Other repertoire can be presented from ‘supplementary lists.’

- The Third Cycle is much freer in the choice of repertoire, and consists of the full array of recital pieces, concertos, etc. The 20th century is well-represented with Bartók, Bengt Brönn, Honegger, Ives, Janacek, Papike-Couture (Canadian), Prévost (Canadian), Mathieu (Canadian), Fallander (Canadian), Roussel (British), Schostakovich, Ravel, Stravinsky, Smyzynsky, and Walton. For the most difficult études, along with the Paganini caprices, he suggests a plenitude of exercises. Hindemith, Wieniawski, Dancla op.73, and De Bériot op. 123.

If you are interested in this pedagogical guide, please contact me at guillaume.etalard@gmail.com 780.435-9569, or write directly to the publisher through their website: www.musiscript.com/letourneau.htm

Guillaume Tardif, DMA
ASA Advisor
2006 Honours Orchestra

From November 10th to 12th, Alberta string students gathered at the University of Alberta for a weekend of practicing, socializing, and performing.

The conductor of this year’s Honours Orchestra was Petar Dundjerski, Assistant Conductor in Residence to the Edmonton Symphony and conductor of the EPS Singing Strings. No stranger to time constraints, Petar worked quickly and efficiently with the orchestra, commanding attention and effort while keeping the students entertained with his characteristic good humour.

In addition to the thirty-one young string players, the orchestra consisted of five student mentors from the University of Alberta’s Academy Strings Orchestra. Alyssa Cheung, Martine denBok, Leslie Mahr, Marin Kloppers and Ted Tessier were excellent section leaders and inspiring role models to the younger musicians. We can’t thank them enough for setting aside an entire weekend to work with us!

Following registration, the 2006 Honours Orchestra began in earnest with a two hour rehearsal on Friday evening. The next day, students met for six more hours of ensemble and sectional rehearsals. That evening, to burn off some steam, staff and students assembled at the Edmonton’s Gateway Entertainment Centre for snacks, bowling, and lazer tag: more than one young player showed the true meaning of versatility, proving that a good bowing arm is a good bowling arm! On Sunday morning, the orchestra rehearsed for two more hours, ate a quick lunch, and then performed at Convocation Hall.

Considering the students had only been playing together for one weekend, the result was truly gratifying: a Sunday afternoon concert of the highest calibre. The performance began with the Honours Orchestra playing “Fantasia Espanola” by Soon Hee Newbold, “Andante” from Symphony No. 5 by Mendelssohn, “Romanian Dances” by Bartok, and selected movements from “‘Holberg’ Suite” by Grieg.

Following the intermission, the audience was treated to a performance of Tchaikovsky’s “Serenade for Strings,” Op. 48, by the Academy Strings, led from the concertmaster’s chair by Aaron Au. To finish the concert, the Honours Orchestra and Academy Strings joined forces to play an arrangement of Saint-Saens’ “Bacchanale from ‘Samson and Delilah.’”

In short, this year’s Honours Orchestra experience was brief, intense, demanding, fun and supremely rewarding for every participant, as the comments we have since received from students and parents prove. We look forward to making it an ASA tradition.

Miriam Ferguson

We would like to thank our sponsors:

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Transylvania Comes to Montreal

It’s 3:00 on a frigid morning in mid-February, and most of Montreal is tucked in bed, but in a community hall just off boulevard Saint-Laurent, the party is just picking up steam. The bar is bustling, the dance floor is packed and a hot band is rattling the rafters, but this is no ordinary hall party; it’s the third annual North American Hungarian Festival, increasingly a magnet for devotees of traditional Hungarian village music and dancing. These people take their fun seriously, spending years of solid abuse.

Transylvania, now firmly and permanently within the borders of Romania, is the polyglot crossroads of Central Europe, home to an enclave of some two million Hungarians as well as a sizable Roma (Gypsy) population. Like most Transylvanian village musicians, Florin’s presence here is a sensational coup: the first time any string musician from Palatka has set foot on North American soil (frozen soil, in this case). Obtaining Canadian travel visas for Roma from Central Europe requires a certain diplomatic sleight of hand, to say nothing of covering hefty travel expenses. Events like the NAHF are thus always precarious, built entirely on the talents and dogged efforts of a handful of volunteers, and no one here is taking their blessings for granted. There is a palpable concentration and focus to this party, borne of the tacit knowledge that we don’t know where or when we’ll all be together like this again. Of all the people in the room, perhaps Florin understands this best; in Transylvania, the future is never certain, and no opportunity to cherish these fragile traditions can be wasted.

The band is taking a well-deserved break, and I’m trying my best to chat with Florin in my spotty Hungarian. Do I understand him correctly? He and his wife are expecting their first child later this year. “The next primás?” I ask.

Florin breaks into his wide, toothy grin—another Kodoba family trademark. “I hope so.”

Jim Cockell

ASAm Board welcomes Tido Janssen

Cellist Tido Janssen joined the music faculty at the University of Lethbridge in the fall of 2006. A native of Germany, Tido started his music education at Folkwang Hochschule für Musik Essen in Düsseldorf and continued his studies in the United States, receiving a MM from Boston University and a DMA in Cello Performance from the University of North Texas. Prior to his appointment at the University of Lethbridge, Tido was Assistant Professor of Cello at Hardin-Simmons University (Texas), principal cellist of the Abilene Philharmonic Orchestra, the Abilene Opera, and the Abilene Chamber Players. He is the founder and former director of the Abilene Summer Music Festival. Tido’s major teachers include Jurgen Wolf, George Neikrug, Walter Gray, and Eugene Osadchy. He studied chamber music with the Muir Quartet, Lydian Quartet, and members of the Lyontevich and former Kolisch Quartets. Tido is a member of the New Hampshire Music Festival Orchestra and has performed as soloist, recitalist, orchestra and chamber musician in Germany, The Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Austria, and throughout the US.

Amaranth

What is an amaranth? Questioning minds found out at the University of Lethbridge Recital Hall on the evening of Sunday, March 11, when Trio Amaranth performed its auspicious debut concert featuring works by Beethoven, Debussy, and Brahms. Trio Amaranth is: Peter Visentin, violin; Tido Janssen, cello; and Deanna Gye, piano; all faculty members at the University of Lethbridge Department of Music. For more information about the ensemble and its activities, please contact Trio Amaranth: (403) 322-5261 tido.janssen@uleth.ca

Cellist Tido Janssen

Amaranth

Tido Janssen

Amaranth

Tido Janssen

Amaranth

Tido Janssen
News from the Edmonton Public Schools Music Enrichment Strings Program

The school year started off very well for the EPS Music Enrichment Strings Program. We have students enrolled in all levels of Violin, Viola, Cello, and Bass, as well as our five orchestras. Our total enrollment is at around 600 students and we have plans to increase this number next year. We offer classes at over twenty Edmonton Public School locations.

This year we are under new direction as Judy Sils, Head of Music at Victoria School, retired in June. The new Artistic Director of Music Enrichment is Kevin Heshedahl. Miriam Ferguson is the Strings Coordinator. In addition to our dedicated returning staff, it has been our pleasure to welcome several new teachers to the program.

This past term, our string classes had no shortage of opportunities to perform for their peers, teachers, and families, from school assemblies and Christmas concerts to our sensational “Winterfest at the Winspear” on December 15th. This concert involved choir, Orff, and string students, all of whom were inspired by the spectacular setting of Edmonton’s Francis Winspear Centre for Music. Our annual Winter Concerts, held at Kate Chegwin and Victoria Schools in January, were a resounding success and a great start to the new year.

Coming up, we will perform at the Edmonton Kiwanis Music Festival (end of April), and in our Spring Concerts (end of May). Orchestras D, C, and B will be touring the city to promote the Strings Program. Orchestra A will be traveling to Fort McMurray and the Singing Strings will perform in Banff.

As EPS string teachers, we thrive on the energy and team spirit of group instruction and we are deeply committed to the cause of public school strings education, despite the neverending challenge of motivating our students to manage their time and practise!

For more information on the Music Enrichment Strings Program, visit our website at: www.musicenrichment.epsb.ca

Upcoming Dates

- April 28-29 Music Enrichment String Classes and Orchestras perform at Kiwanis Festival
- May 17-18 Music Enrichment Orchestra A on tour to Fort McMurray
- May 29 Music Enrichment Spring Concert at Kate Chegwin School (3119 – 48 St), 7:00 pm Admission is free
- May 31 Music Enrichment Spring Concert at Victoria School (10210 – 108 Ave), 7:00 pm Admission is free
- June 11-14 Auditions for Music Enrichment String Orchestras B, A, and Singing Strings Call 498-8706 for more information or to book an audition

In accordance with FOIPP guidelines, Alberta String Association’s policy is that all personal information, email address, will remain undisclosed and in the strict use of the ASA administrators only.

Membership Form

ALBERTA STRING ASSOCIATION

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Email: info@albertastringassociation.ca
Phone: (780) 439-8795

Please mail this form and payment to:
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617 Henderson Street
Edmonton, AB
T6R 1J4

Please make cheque or money order payable to: Alberta String Association

The Alberta String Association (ASA), formerly known as the Association of String Teachers and Performers of Alberta (ASTAPA), was founded in 1979, and is registered as a non-profit society with charitable status.

The ASA is a network of string professionals, string students, and string-interested parties advocating quality string playing and quality string education in the province of Alberta.

The ASA strives to support and to develop programs that can serve the aforementioned purposes. This includes services such as the ASA newsletter, the ASA website/directory, and the ASA music and video library. It also involves professional and student meetings such as specialized workshops, advocacy and benefit events, and a provincial conference.

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About ASA

www.albertastringassociation.ca
Visit our website for:

• Resource Directory
• Online Calendar
• Honours Orchestra Registration Form
• Past and present Newsletters
• Job Postings
• And more...

To have your events posted on the online calendar, or if you would like to be posted in our resource directory, please contact:
info@albertastringassociation.ca

The Alberta String Association (ASA), formerly known as the Association of String Teachers and Performers of Alberta (ASTAPA), was founded in 1979 as a non-profit, charitable society. The ASA strives to support and to develop programs serving a network of string professionals, string students, and string-interested parties advocating quality string playing and quality string education in the province of Alberta. Members are registered with the ASA upon payment of an annual membership fee.

Editor: Jim Cockell
Please send your news, articles, pictures and other submissions to newsletter@albertastringassociation.ca

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info@albertastringassociation.ca

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University of Lethbridge is Hosting 2007 Honours Orchestra November 9-11

The University of Lethbridge Department of Music is eagerly looking forward to hosting the 2007 Alberta String Association Honours Orchestra this November 9, 10 and 11. There will be two orchestras this year, one for more advanced players grade 6 and over and one for our more junior students. Preparations are also underway to expand the weekend into a conference for string teachers and students. We will keep you posted about this upcoming event on our website and in the ASA email updates.

If you are interested in presenting a lecture or performance during the conference, please send proposals to the Alberta String Association. Proposal application forms will be made available in the near future on the ASA website: www.albertastringassociation.ca

www.albertastringassociation.ca

ASA Board of Directors

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<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Josephine van Lier</td>
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<td>Bonnie Anderson</td>
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