Dear string enthusiasts,

In this issue you will find a variety of items reflecting the rich diversity of the Alberta string community. On a sad note, we are losing our trusty editor; many thanks to Jim for all his excellent work over the last three years. We are currently seeking a volunteer with an interest in writing to fill this important and rewarding position; if you or someone you know is interested, please let me know!

In November the Alberta String Association will be hosting the Honours Orchestra in Edmonton under the baton of professor Tanya Prochazka. String students aged 12-18 (grades 6 and up) will be able to participate in this weekend string orchestra event, which will culminate in a performance on Sunday afternoon.

This year we are happy to be a sponsor of the Second Lethbridge Cello Festival. You can read more about that event in this issue.

We have once again included a membership form in this newsletter, and we hope you will take time to fill it out and join the growing ASA community. Our members have access to a range of exclusive benefits, such as:

- promoting their teaching and performing activities through the ASA website, newsletter and mail outs;
- free concert announcements through our email database to the entire string community (not just the ASA membership) in the region of your choice;
- free access to our library;
- students of private teachers who are ASA member don’t have to pay a membership fee to participate in the Honours Orchestra;
- staying connected with the Alberta string community;
- taking advantage of significant discounts at participating music retailers (please check our website for a list).

As an active string organization (the only one of its kind in Canada!) we are committed to supporting the activities of all Alberta string players—students, professionals and amateurs. Submissions to the ASA newsletter are welcome from teachers, students, performers and string enthusiasts alike (you will find all of the above represented in this issue). Now is a great time to get involved with the ASA as a member, volunteer, or contributor.

Of course we welcome your feedback at any time!
I always hear the same story from people who have just made their first trip to Hungary. “We went to a café,” they marvel, “and the Gypsy band played our favourite tune for us!” It’s the business of the Gypsy café musician to know thousands of selections: Liszt, Brahms and Léhar; popular Hungarian standards such as ‘Csak egy kislány’ (adapted by Sarasate for ‘Zigeunerweisen’); and international hits like ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’ and ‘Misty’. Even more uncanny is the ability of such musicians to learn on the spot, inviting patrons to “just hum it to us,” and thus pick up a tune, harmonies and all, on a single hearing. But Gypsy bands are more than simply jukeboxes with a pulse; every tune they play goes through the prism of their unique rhythmic, harmonic and decorative traditions, meaning that you are guaranteed a performance of your favourite tune—no matter what it is—like you’ve never heard it before.

Now to the good news for Albertans: these traditions may soon be on their way to a restaurant or hall near you, thanks to Lénard Balázs and his son, Richárd. Until recently their home was Eger, a picturesque city in the hills of northern Hungary, famous in part for its distinctive bikavér (‘bull’s blood’) wine, exported around the globe. Music has been in the Balázs family for generations, passed from father to son in the manner common to all Gypsy musicians (more correctly known as Roma, a distinct ethnic group whose ancestral homeland has been traced back to northern India). As a violist in the critically acclaimed Száztagú cigányzenekar (Hundred Member Gypsy Orchestra), Lénard played in major concert halls across Europe and Asia for several years; he is also an accomplished luthier whose instruments can be found across Europe and North America.

Richárd, a violinist, was a star protegé of the prestigious Rajko organization in Budapest; just shy of his twentieth birthday, he is already a seasoned virtuoso and teacher. But times in Hungary have never been easy for the Roma and, acting on the advice of an old friend, Lénard made the difficult decision bring his family to Edmonton in search of a better life.

That life, admits Lénard, will be radically different from the one they knew before. Orchestral musicians in North America have a more rigid professional ethos, meaning that a conventional music career for either Lénard or Richárd is probably not in the cards. Gypsy music, Lénard explains, is more about establishing an immediate bond with the audience and adapting to its tastes. “One day there might be a group of Poles in the restaurant,” he recalls, “and the next it might be Germans. We played for everyone, and we knew their songs.” If a patron began singing a different tune from the one the band was playing, they would immediately fall in behind the singer, who would remunerate the players accordingly. “There was no contract with the restaurant,” Lénard says. “If the owners or the patrons didn’t like us, we wouldn’t be invited back the next day.”

Even as the whole family labours to adapt to the pace of North American life, Lénard and Richárd are determined to hang on to their versatile, distinctive musical roots, and eager to introduce them to local audiences (promoters and business owners, take note!). Lénard is also looking forward to setting up shop and getting back to the business of instrument making, which he has pursued since 1994. He produces a slab of well-seasoned maple, brought all the way from Hungary. “This will make a lovely violin back,” he beams.
First Lethbridge Cello Fest

Submitted by Tido Janssen

The highly successful First Lethbridge Cello Fest took place on the last weekend in April, 2008. Twenty-one cellists from across Alberta assembled to rehearse and perform cello ensemble music of diverse styles and levels of difficulty. Cellists Tido Janssen from the University of Lethbridge, Christine Bootland from the Medicine Hat Conservatory of Music, and Mark Rogers of the Musaeus Quartet and the Lethbridge Conservatory of Music, led the rehearsals for the various ensembles.

Planning is well underway for the Second Lethbridge Cello Fest, scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, May 23-24, 2009. Once again, ensembles will work with Tido Janssen, Christine Bootland, and Mark Rogers. In addition, we have invited two guest artists: Walter Gray, cellist of the Seattle Symphony and founding member of the world renowned Kronos Quartet, who will perform a recital and offer master classes; and Edmonton’s own Josephine van Lier, who will present her monumental Bach Suite Project, performing all six Bach Cello Suites on four different cellos!

Don’t miss out! Contact Tido Janssen at tido.janssen@uleth.ca or 403-332-5261 for registration information.

Edmonton Public School Board Update

Submitted by Caitlin Smith

The Edmonton Public School Board Music Enrichment program has undergone some major changes this year. We are teaching out of some of the same schools as well as some new ones. Big changes have their challenges but we are hoping that this will help the program run smoothly in the future.

We now have classes at Londonderry School on Monday evenings, Hardisty School on Tuesday evenings, D.S. MacKensie on Wednesday evenings and Victoria School on Thursday evenings. There are other classes offered at various other sites throughout the city but these are our main sites.

Our Orchestras have changed a little bit as well. We still have 5 groups but have labelled them differently. Orchestra D is now Beginner Orchestra and is conducted by Mathias Silveira and Sarah Woodman. Orchestra C is now Junior Orchestra conducted by Ann Murray. Orchestra B is now Intermediate Orchestra conducted by Ian Woodman. Orchestra A is now Senior Orchestra conducted by Caitlin Smith, and Singing Strings has remained with the same name conducted by Petar Dundjerski.

Three of these orchestra’s recently performed at the Winspear Centre as part of Edmonton Public Schools Music Enrichment concert Winterfest. Intermediate, Senior and Singing Strings performed very well! Members from all three orchestras came together to perform the finale, The Huron Carol, arranged for us by Jim Cockell.

A huge thanks to all the parents, students and teachers that have been very patient during the implementation of these changes.

If you have any questions regarding the Music Enrichment String Program please contact the Music Enrichment office at (780) 498-8706.
From October 18 to October 25, 2008, The Muziekgebouw aan ’t IJ in Amsterdam was abuzz with cellists and cello fans from around the world, gathered to take part in the Second Amsterdam Cello Biennial. Already the largest cello festival in the world, the biennial is an event where ‘core repertoire happily rubs shoulders with new music, hot off the press with the ink scarcely dried’, as described in the jam-packed program booklet. Participants took in no less than five world premières and a bounty of seldom-performed music, old and new. One of the most commanding presences to return to the event was Anner Bijlsma, who led lunch-hour discussions with many of the guest artists. As always, Bijlsma was educational and entertaining, referring at one point to the arpeggione (an obsolete, guitar-like cousin of the modern cello, perpetually in need of tuning) as “an instrument for a bachelor with too much time on his hands.” The eccentric Pieter Wispelweij also returned to lead the audience through a ‘blind taste test’ of brand new cellos, demonstrating a wide range of examples and styles on each, and challenging listeners to distinguish between three of these and an old Italian instrument (to our collective astonishment, a new instrument by Dutch maker Saskia Schouten turned out to be the audience favourite). Many of my other favorites—Jean-Guihen Queyras, Colin Carr, Roel Dieltiens, Michel Strauss—were there to participate in a variety of programs, including the daily, schedule-opening performance of each of the Bach solo suites, which seems already to have become a festival tradition. Sicilian cellist Giovanni Sollima took the festival by storm, first with a breathtaking rendition of Bach’s fourth solo suite; later with a program of his own compositions, in which he led a large cello ensemble from Zagreb as soloist. A truly versatile cellist, Sollima brought fresh energy and inspiration to standards such as Marain Marais’s ‘La Folia’, and even managed to top things off with a little Jimi Hendrix.

Other festival highlights included a tribute to the legendary Gregor Piatagorsky by two former pupils, Godfried Hoogeveen (principal cellist of the renowned Concertgebouw Orchestra) and Nathaniel Rosen, whose powerful presence and Montagnana cello made him the dominant member of the pair. Both men delivered a true cellist’s program, ending with a Kummer duet (familiar to students) that left the audience smiling. Then there was the intriguingly-titled ‘Family or Not’, a program showcasing the aforementioned arpeggione and an even more obscure cousin to the cello, the baryton—famously played by Haydn’s employer, Prince Esterhazy—distinguished by an array of resonating strings behind the fingerboard, playable with the left thumb! Christiaan Norde performed skillfully on both instruments; his rendition of Schubert’s ‘Arpeggione Sonata’ was especially memorable.

The biennial has quickly evolved into a panoply of everything current in the cello world: cutting-edge research into changes in vibrato and bow technique; the most prominent soloists and teachers on the planet; instruments new and old; and the entire spectrum of cello repertoire. Above all, the biennial fosters a climate of respect, enthusiasm, room for disagreement, and a shared love for this great instrument. I am already looking forward to the next biennial in 2010.
FOCUS ON FIDDLING

Submitted by John Calverley

I’m often asked about the most important considerations for playing ‘back-up’ in a group situation. As individual fiddlers we typically focus on playing melody, forgetting that the violin can also have a strong harmonic presence. At ‘fiddle jams’ I’m always struck by the fact that nobody seems willing to break away from playing the melody in unison with everybody else—to explore a deeper musical understanding through harmonic accompaniment—for fear of being left behind, floundering about on the fingerboard. In all the country band gigs I’ve played, by contrast, the ability to provide supporting harmonies, fills and improvised solos based on the chord changes has proven far more useful than having a stock of traditional fiddle tunes. Here are a few ideas which have served me well when confronted with lead sheets on the bandstand.

- Play the root note of the chord. This is the easiest way to interpret chord symbols because the chord quality is irrelevant.

- Play a double stop for each chord, adding the fifth above the root. As the violin is tuned in fifths, this is easy. Practice a one octave scale in fifths (fig.1).

- Next, invert the top note of each fifth in fig.1. The fifths played using the G string cannot be inverted, so start halfway through the scale (fig.2). Using the same notes produces interval of a fourth. This technique of inverting the interval enables us to cover a full octave using only two strings. Any chord can therefore be realized using any pair of strings. Practice a one octave span, using a natural note for the root, on each remaining pair of strings (fig.3). Lower the fifth a semi-tone for the diminished chord. Raise the fifth for an augmented chord.

- The final exercises outline the root and fifth, as before. Fig. 4 substitutes the third, while Fig. 5 substitutes the seventh.

These ideas can help you in almost any situation where you need to improvise a supporting part based on chord changes. Playing through these exercises will help to develop a deeper harmonic connection with your instrument and perhaps turn a few heads at the next fiddle jam.

John Calverley is the author of Improvisational Method for Violin. For more information and orders, please contact the author at superfiddle@shaw.ca.
Strings Across Alberta

Submitted by Tido Janssen

This spring string faculty from various Alberta institutions started a new collaboration by playing in a concert series across the province. The concert series started at the University of Lethbridge as part of the U of L “Faculty Artists and Friends” concert series and the performances were repeated at the Medicine Hat Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre and in Convocation Hall at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. All performers enjoyed this collaboration and are planning to repeat and possibly extend this idea in the future to include more colleagues from across the province. This year’s performers were Trio Amaranth (Peter Visentin, violin; Tido Janssen, cello; and Deanna Oye, piano) from the University of Lethbridge, Guillaume Tardif (violin) from the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Edmond Agopian (violin) and Beth Sandvoss (cello) from the University of Calgary, and Michael van der Sloot (viola) from Medicine Hat College.

If you are interested, come and hear the last performance of this series on June 5th (8:00pm) as part of “Contrasts - University of Calgary Chamber Music Festival” in the U of C Rozsa Centre (Tickets $12, for more information call 403-210-7576)
First Name:     Last name:  
Address:  
City:       Province:   Postal Code:  
Phone:      Cell Phone:    Fax:  
Email Address  
Website:  
Instrument:  
Description of string activities, string interests:  

**MEMBERSHIP FEES:**

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For more information:  
Website: www.albertastringassociation.ca  
Email: info@albertastringassociation.ca  
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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.

Members are registered with the ASA upon payment of an annual membership fee.

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.
About the ASA

www.albertastringassociation.ca
Visit our website for:

• Resource Directory
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• Past and present Newsletters
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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

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At the Amsterdam Cello Biennial...

Alberta String Association
Library

We are updating and increasing our library listings. For a complete catalogue of string-related music, videos, DVDs, and books available, please see our website.

Remember, ASA members borrow for free!

For information on borrowing materials, please contact our librarian Miriam Ferguson at library@albertastringassociation.ca or 903-7406.

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