

THE *glissando*

PACIFIC HARP INSTITUTE NEWSLETTER | SPRING 2009 | VOLUME 2, ISSUE 4

Mme Elizabeth Fontan 2009 ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE

PHI'S ARTIST RESIDENCY THIS YEAR will be filled by French harpist Elizabeth Fontan, a student of Marcel Tournier at the Paris Conservatoire and a long-time teacher at the conservatory in the city of Nice. Mme Fontan taught Valerie Muzzolini, principal harpist at the Seattle Symphony, and Valerie was kind enough to talk to Mme Fontan and to share some of her own experiences with her teacher, helping us to understand the continuing impact of the French school established in Paris by Hasselmans, Tournier, and their successors, which we discussed in the previous issue of the *Glissando*. (ShruDeLi Ownbey, at Lyon & Healy West, has given us a graded listing of published and recorded works by Hasselmans and Tournier, which we have posted on the PHI website at http://www.pacificharpinstitute.org/docs/hasselmans_tournier.pdf. Many thanks to her for this extensive and useful information.)

Mme Fontan began her studies with Tournier when

she was six years old; she entered the conservatory in 1939, at age thirteen, and graduated five years later. In her early studies, she would work on a piece with one of Tournier's assistants first and then play for him when it was fully prepared; other Tournier students also described the same multi-tiered approach in their early years. There was a similar multi-part approach to the lessons themselves. At the Conservatoire, the students would have a master class each week with Tournier, at which each student would prepare one etude per week and one new piece for performance each month.

In an interview in *Harp Today* (Fall 1998), Mme Fontan recalled the nerve-racking weekly master classes. Tournier "would call on us arbitrarily, so we had no idea in which order we would perform and we would be asked to play immediately without warming up. . . . I can remember so clearly his reaction if an etude or piece wasn't played well or just wasn't ready. He would not say a word, he would just close the score and hand it back to the student. All of us knew what he meant, bring it back

next time and mean it." (This was apparently Hasselmans' practice as well. According to Pierre Jamet, "it was out of the question to bring etudes [to Hasselmans' class] that could not be played by heart; without that the music would have been immediately closed on the stand!") The private lessons, however, were held at Tournier's home and, as Mme Fontan emphasized, they "were a time to be treasured. His house was a beautiful sanctuary filled with artwork and I felt so privileged to be a part of his world."

All of Tournier's students recall a strict, rather stern teacher. Jacqueline Borot, who worked with Tournier in the early 1930s, remembered that he was "very demanding of

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LETTER FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

I RECENTLY LED A WORKSHOP WHICH included a discussion of how to overcome the fear factor in performance, emphasizing adequate and correct practice habits. In this workshop we watched part of the 1980s movie "Gremlins." How does this relate to the harp? Let's just say that the cute little Gremlin of the movie is inside each one of us. He represents our confidence and our desire to play the harp well and to share our music with others. Things can get out of control, however, when the harp Gremlin gets out of his box and causes all kinds of trouble with nerves, shaking hands, memory problems, too much adrenaline, etc. Those of us who have had performance experience can relate to this idea. The cure for this is to create a piggy bank of confidence that sits soundly on top of the Gremlin's box and never allows him to escape in the first place.

The idea even applies to this newsletter, for at PHI we experienced a Gremlin-like failure when we lost our database. It has been recovered, thankfully, and so we are sending you two editions of the *Glissando* together. We are looking forward with anticipation to having our Artist in Residence, Elizabeth Fontan, with us from Nice, France; be sure to come to her recital at Benaroya Hall on April 17 and learn and hear more about our French harp roots. We will be sure to talk to Mme Fontan about performance preparedness when she gives her master classes during her visit. We also want to offer special thanks to Lyon and Healy West, particularly to ShruDeLi Ownbey, owner, who spent untold hours preparing the list of Hasselmans and Tournier recordings and music included in this newsletter.

So, read on, practice on (slowly and carefully!), and enjoy! 🎵

ALISON AUSTIN
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Supporting the arts in tough times

BILL AUSTIN | BOARD PRESIDENT

DEAR FRIENDS,

This year PHI is excited to explore the French School of the harp. We are honored to present the legendary Elizabeth Fontan Binoche in recital at the Nordstrom Recital Hall at Benaroya Hall on April 17. As this year's Artist in Residence, Mme Fontan will also be featured in a series of master classes for young harpists in the area. We encourage you to attend these special events and support PHI's quality programs. Ticket and sign-up information is available on our website.

We need your help going forward. In these challenging economic times it is of the utmost importance that we do not lose touch with our artistic souls. This includes passing the gift of art and music-making on to the next generation by our support of non-profit and other arts organizations. PHI is in a tenuous situation. We are a young and therefore vulnerable organization; many grants and funding opportunities are only open to more established groups. Please contact me, the board, or Alison directly to offer your encouragement, your support, and your dollars. 🎵

2009 Summer Sessions

SESSION I: JULY 27 - AUGUST 1, 2009

ADVANCED SOLO & CHAMBER CAMP

In 2009, Judy Loman will be joining us for Summer Session I the last week of July at Bastyr University and will be presenting a recital open to the general public as well. Our theme is *In preparation for...* (preparing for auditions, competitions, recitals, and the like). Faculty for SSI includes Faye Seeman (Professor of Harp at Wheaton College), Janet Witman (founder of Brandywine Harps in Philadelphia), Ruth Mar (graduate of the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto), and Alison Austin (PHI Founder and Artistic Director).

SESSION II: AUGUST 3-8, 2009

BEGINNER TO INTERMEDIATE CAMP

The theme for SSII is *From France with Love*. Faculty for SSII includes Alison Austin, Faye Seeman, and Elizabeth Volpe-Bligh (Principal Harpist of the Vancouver Symphony).

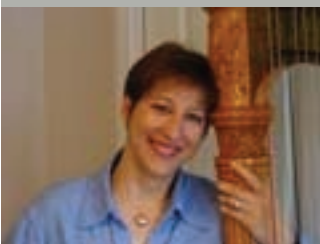
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his students and could be altogether disagreeable if one hadn't worked." Mme Fontan said that, although Tournier was indeed quite reserved, when he did speak, "his words were golden." He also drew imagery from other sources, especially art, in his teaching. She recalled in the *Harp Today* interview that Tournier "never had to play for you to understand what he meant. He would explain things in very short sentences and sometimes just trill a little with his left hand. And before he would even finish explaining, you would understand what he wanted. . . . his eyes, his gestures would speak a thousand words." The greatest compliment she received from him, she said, was when he came to the first recital she gave after graduating from the conservatory. "Congratulations," Tournier told her. "You will play very well in ten years."

Mme Fontan's studies took place at a particularly difficult time, in the 1940's during the Second World War in Paris. She remembered that the Conservatoire was so cold during that time that the students had to play while wearing fingerless gloves in order to keep their hands warm! Another of Tournier's students during this period was Gérard Davos, who recalled that somehow, throughout the War years, his mother managed to find English cigarettes to present to his teacher after each lesson. Although they rarely spoke of the tremendous upheavals surrounding them during those years, Davos said that Tournier's Second Sonata, written in Paris during the War, both reflects the events of the time and represents an escape from them as well.

Mme Fontan's own approach as a teacher was very much like that of Tournier. As she told *Harp Today*, "I am forever marked with his teachings and certainly a different person because of it. It is because of this that I feel a responsibility to connect the next generation of harpists to his work, to pass on to my students the music, the methods, and the sensitivity that he gave to me." As a teacher, Valerie explained, Mme Fontan focused on the basic etudes (Bochsa, Pozzoli, Grossi, Dizi, and so forth), one per week and always memorized, and on one larger piece in progress. Her goal, said Valerie, was always interpretation, color, phrasing, and the like; she did not assign an etude merely to address a technical issue and was not interested in technique for its own sake. Rather, she focused on the repertoire, especially the solo repertoire, as the true source of both inspiration and technique for the performer. She, too, was a strict teacher, recalled Valerie, and she shared with Tournier the intuitive ability to assess her students' potential even if the student was unaware of his or her own strengths and weaknesses.

Valerie pointed to several elements of Mme Fontan's method that seem to differentiate the French approach from the American. First of all, the French harp tradition is one of soloists—as Valerie said, the lessons were intended to teach the student to be a solo player, not to be a member of a chamber ensemble or an orchestra. Thus the focus was on the solo repertoire, memorization at lessons, and a great deal of public performance. Valerie also noted that the relationship between student and teacher in

France was and is quite different and much more formal than the American teaching style. When Tournier—always addressed as Maître—entered the room, for example, all the students stood up. Even now, Valerie explained, she always uses the formal form of address to Mme Fontan, although they have known each other for many years outside the conservatory; the student-teacher bond in this system is meant to be intense and long-lived, with no intervening "studio parent" added into the mix.

Mme Fontan taught the music she was most familiar with, the great French solo repertoire, and this is the music she will play for us at her recital here in Seattle. As she told *Harp Today*, "sometimes I hear people performing Tournier's compositions and they just don't seem to understand, there is no feeling behind the music, it doesn't come to life." Tournier, she said, "felt strongly, as I do today, that each note is different from the previous note or the one that will follow. Every note is unique. In helping us interpret the music, he was very precise about wanting us to read exactly what he had written in the music, that the dynamic begins or ends exactly on the note stated, and that the emotion, the feeling, was just as important." We can get a sense of Mme Fontan's insights into this style through her recording on the *Masters of Harp Composition* series (from Lyon & Healy and Salvi Harps), on which she performs works by her teacher. And on April 17 at Benaroya, we can hear for ourselves what Mme Fontan meant when she described Tournier as "a master in musical suppleness. I think he instilled in each of us a love for poetry and sensitivity, the same emotions infused in his compositions." ♪

"Before [Tournier] would even finish explaining, you would understand what he wanted... his eyes, his gestures would speak a thousand words."

PHI 2009 ARTIST RESIDENCY APRIL 17-18, 2009

FRIDAY, APRIL 17, 2009 | 7:30PM

ELIZABETH FONTAN RECITAL

The legendary French harpist presents a recital at Benaroya Recital Hall in Seattle as part of PHI's Artist Residency program, featuring works by Tournier, Faure, and Ravel. Mme Fontan will also be joined by Seattle Symphony principal harpist Valerie Muzzolini.

\$15 adults / \$10 students. Tickets available at ticketmaster.com.

SATURDAY, APRIL 18, 2009 | 10AM - 4:30PM

ELIZABETH FONTAN MASTERCLASS

Local harp students play for Mme Fontan in a masterclass setting. Open to the public.

\$50 half-hour session / \$10 auditor fee. Registration forms available at pacificharpinstitute.org.

Canto Mio

Making Music, Touching Hearts

BEFORE MME FONTAN'S CONCERT ON April 17, the foyer of Nordstrom Recital Hall at Benaroya will be ringing with the sounds of Canto Mio, the PHI select harp quartet. The members of this group, all between the ages of 13 and 15 and chosen by audition, perform widely throughout the Seattle/Eastside area for non-profit fundraisers. As director Alison Austin emphasizes, this is a fully volunteer organization and the participants are using their musical skills to foster community outreach. Their latest undertaking is learning about the recording process, from the initial planning stages through the final studio work. Their upcoming CD will be sold on-line (see future newsletters for additional information) and all profits will be divided between the PHI Summer Session scholarship fund and the Make-A-Wish Foundation. (In fact one of the members, Natalie, says that their contributions to the Make-A-Wish Foundation is one of her favorite reasons for being in Canto Mio.)



All the members of the ensemble emphasize not just the wonderful musical opportunities and growth the group has provided, but how they have become a true family. As Alexandra put it, "I feel that my closest friends are my harp friends. We see each other every week, we learn our music together, we help each other, we work together . . . we, Canto Mio, are a unit." Lisa and Natalie both described how that works

in practice, recalling a performance where they all felt unusually nervous. So before they started playing, they all sat in a circle together, held hands, and calmed each other down. As Lisa described this time, "I felt like at that moment we were a whole, a group, [almost] a family, and we played very well that night." Natalie recounted another favorite performance at a local nursing home, adding that "there was one lady who missed the whole concert, so I want to go back and play for her." Charlene, another member of the ensemble, also recalls their many performances fondly, describing the fun they have had making music together at these fundraisers. Alexandra summarized what she has learned with the group, saying that "Canto Mio is a wonderful way to learn to share responsibility, to do your part, and smile at the result and know you couldn't have done it alone." These are the words and experiences not just of extraordinary young musicians, but of extraordinary young women who will make their mark on the world through their performances. ♪

WELLNESS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

shows the importance of this sort of regular warm-up, for she includes a series of diagrams showing the areas most affected by playing and/or moving the instrument. Gaál focuses on various mind-body techniques (some of which we have addressed in this column, for example the Feldenkrais Method and the Alexander Technique), as well as issues of both physical and mental fatigue.

Semmler also emphasizes the importance of selecting instruments and developing playing positions that fit each individual's specific size and anatomy. Alison adds some specific recommendations in this area, suggesting that most benches work best when set between 18 and 21 inches in height. She emphasizes the need to examine the torso and leg length, in order to find a position that will allow the performer to keep a straight back and thus reduce fatigue. She says that when the bench is adjusted to the proper height, the performer can turn her head and be level with the second octave F string.

All of these writers suggest that harpists be very aware of pain as they practice, and that they incorporate breaks into their practice sessions. Gaál recommends the same sorts of approaches used in the PHI sessions, that is, frequent breaks (including some physical exercise) as a normal part of practicing. Alison suggests no more than 50 minutes of playing before taking a ten-minute break to rest and stretch. This is in addition to a daily warm-up routine for the hands to stretch the key muscle groups used in playing. She has her students begin playing mezzo forte and very slowly at the beginning of a practice session, just as one would stretch and warm up before any other sort of exercise. Breathing and relaxation techniques, which she teaches at the Summer Sessions, also help to prevent tension and fatigue. (These issues are also discussed in previous issues of this column, where additional resources are listed.)

We will continue to address these issues in upcoming columns, offering additional reading specific to the needs of harpists. We also hope to have an interview with Carol Duffy, a Northwest clinical hand therapist who gave a presentation on hand biomechanics for harpists at the national conference of the American Harp Society in 2002. She wrote a detailed article describing common problems of harpists along with suggestions for remedies, which we will review here. ♪

RESOURCES MENTIONED IN THIS ARTICLE:

- Cayea, Danelle and Ralph A. Manchester. "Instrument-specific Rates of Upper-extremity Injuries in Music Students." *Medical Problems of Performing Artists* 13, no. 1 (1998): 19-25.
- Duffy, Carol. "Give Yourself a Hand." *Harp Column* (May/June 2003): 26-33.
- Gaál, Erzsébet. "Harpists' Health and Fitness." *American Harp Journal* 16, no. 3 (Summer, 1998): 31-34. (The truly intrepid researcher might want to know about Gaál's D.Mus. dissertation, "Incidence of Occupational-related Problems among Harpists," Indiana University, 2000; it is not available locally.)
- Semmler, Caryl J. "Harp Aches." *Medical Problems of Performing Artists* 13, no. 1 (1998): 35-39.

Musicians' Wellness: Harp-Related Research and Issues

DEBORAH L. PIERCE | CONTRIBUTING WRITER

AS ALL OF THOSE WHO have been involved with PHI certainly know, issues of health, body conditioning, and proper exercise technique are crucial to harpists. Although there has been a great deal of research and publication on musicians' wellness as a whole in the past decade or so, there is still little that specifically addresses issues for harp players. The surveys that do exist point to two alarming facts: harpists are not only among the most at risk in terms of injury, but they also ignore the warning signs of pain and fatigue and do not prepare themselves physically for practice sessions and performance. One study, by Danelle Cayea and

Ralph Manchester, covers information collected over fourteen years (1982-96) for instrument-specific upper-extremity injuries in music students; the highest rate of injuries was reported among harpists. Two studies from the 1990s were specific to harp. Erzsébet Gaál, a Hungarian harpist, surveyed harpists in 47 countries on their physical and mental health. Gaál was startled to find that almost one-half of her respondents were concerned about their ability to continue to play due to injuries and pain. She found that few prepared their bodies for the physical demands of harp playing or used practice strategies to

help prevent injuries, and that the most common ways for harpists to find relief from both fatigue and pain were to rest or stop playing, although a small percentage of respondents reported that they continued to play in spite of these signals. The same sorts of findings appeared in the work by occupational therapist Caryl Semmler, who surveyed harpists in Texas about their experience with pain and with techniques used for relief. She found not only that harpists experience the most pain in the back, neck, and shoulders, but that many harpists continue to play even when they are in pain.

Both Gaál and Semmler include suggestions for

relieving pain and, most important, for preventing pain in the first place, and their suggestions coincide with the approach integrated into the PHI Summer Session programs. Overall, as PHI director Alison Austin emphasizes, the harp requires total body care, so she recommends not only a program such as Pilates, Yoga, or regular massages, but also specific daily stretches geared to the areas most affected, the upper- and mid-back and the pectoral area, which is where harpists are prone to a great deal of tension from holding up the arms. Semmler's article

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