

THE *glissando*

PACIFIC HARP INSTITUTE NEWSLETTER | SUMMER 2009 | VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1

“IN PREPARATION FOR...”

IS THE theme of PHI's Summer Session I harp camp for 2009 and it takes us straight into the heart and soul of the performing musician. How do I prepare for auditions? How do I practice efficiently and successfully? How do I battle performance anxiety and beware of physical stress? Although practicing strategies and public performance are central to the idea of preparation, PHI Artistic Director Alison Austin emphasizes that this is only the tip of the iceberg, the public display of what amounts to months, even years, of planning, practicing, and information gathering. “Our discussions at this camp,” she emphasizes, “will cover not just strategies in the practice room, not just learning the repertoire, but how to set goals, how to be prepared for any opportunity that arises. The students need to think beyond the practice room and they need to think about where they want to go in their playing and how they might get there.”

Each of the 2009 PHI teachers has navigated these complex waters in different ways and they will gather together in a wide-ranging panel discussion at camp to talk about these issues. Judy Loman is a teacher extraordinaire, teaching at the premiere institutions in the U.S. and Canada (the Curtis Institute and the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto), and she has managed a stellar international solo and recording career as well as collaboration with many composers. And in addition to all of this, she has had, as her former student Ruth Mar (another camp instructor)

describes it, a “vibrant family life,” as the loving profile of her career by her daughter Linda Umbrico in the *American Harp Journal* makes so clear (summer 1997 issue). How did she do it? Her own descriptions are modest. When asked in an interview for the journal *Harpa* (2000) how she balanced her professional and family life, her response – smiling – was, “Just hang on every day.” She elaborated a bit in the *AHJ* interview, where she describes the focus required when preparing to make a recording for the Canadian Broadcast Corporation in the late 1960s: “This was a turning point for me. The recording was quite an effort. Up until then I was coasting

along having a wonderful time as a musician. I had facility and knowledge, but my endurance was not up to the demands of a full recording. I really had to dig in and practice. . . . I developed a warmup that I could use to keep up a strong technique

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**KEYS TO
SUCCESSFUL
PREPARATION**

LETTER FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Hello again!

This year's PHI roster of students is fascinating and humbling. We have students coming from three of the four corners of our country and from the center as well. We have teachers from the East, West, Midwest, and our neighboring Canada. As you read on you will be able to see the broad spectrum of ideas and the core concepts we will be teaching at this year's Summer Session I; we carry these themes into Session II with an emphasis on American and French music.

Balance is the idea behind this year's camp themes. This is a region steeped in the Salzedo tradition of teaching and music. We endeavored to achieve balance by bringing our French roots to the Northwest with the fabulous concert and master class by Elizabeth Fontan, where she literally "channeled Tournier" in her performance. She was a true artist and a gracious and great teacher as well, as the students who attended her master class can attest.

When I first began teaching I told a young student who had great potential that "I could teach her as far as she wanted to go." She took me up on my offer and ended up playing in her school orchestra, being a finalist in the AHS National competition, and touring Europe, performing a solo with her orchestra in twelve different cathedrals on their tour. She went on to study harp at her university although she eventually chose a different major. Everywhere she went she gave it her best effort. The amazing part was that she would only and faithfully practice one hour a day. Now, I am not suggesting that this is the secret to success. I am sure that many students, myself included, will tell you that they had to practice much more than one hour a day to achieve success. However, this student was able to do what so many of our Session I teachers recommend in this newsletter: practice with full concentration, practice carefully, and, as Judy Loman says, practice with the true "presence" of your head, your hands, and your ears each time you come to the instrument. As my student showed, you can achieve great things with this kind of focus.

We have many ideas and experiences to share with you as we move into this year's Summer Sessions. Read on and remember all are welcome to attend the exciting concerts that we have planned for you, from the marvelous Master Judy Loman on July 29 to the many wonderful student performances we will be showcasing. 🎵



ALISON AUSTIN
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

WELLNESS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

MENTAL PREPARATION

Studies show that musicians who use a combination of mental practice or visualization along with physically practicing the music perform at a higher level, and with less injury and performance anxiety, than those who work only on the notes in the practice room. There are many different approaches to mental preparation and we will be covering some of these in more detail in upcoming issues. Elizabeth Volpé-Bligh stresses visualization: "Once you have a piece memorized," she writes, "go somewhere quiet, close your eyes and visualize yourself playing the piece, looking at every note carefully. You'd be surprised to find out that you may have thought you had it memorized, but you really aren't 100% sure of each note." It can be helpful to do mock-ups of the performance (including concert dress and shoes!) both physically and mentally (try visualizing walking out on stage and looking at the faces in your audience) as well as using various positive mental techniques such as regular meditation, positive self-talk, or focusing on inspirational words or phrases.

THE MIND/BODY CONNECTION

The integration of mind and body preparation is an extremely important area for musicians to work toward and study. They go hand in hand; for example, your body is likely to be tense if you have anxiety about a performance, and this in turn affects the body, making you more prone to injury. Two important things to do to facilitate this mind/body integration are to stay relaxed and to breathe deeply at all times, during practice sessions as well as during rehearsals and performances. As Elizabeth says, "Always stay relaxed when practicing, and practice breathing deeply as you start new phrases." Judy Loman adds: "Of course, there are the obvious things that one should avoid before a performance, such as caffeine and lack of sleep. Not a good idea to do a full day of gardening or run a marathon, either. Performing is a highly energy draining task, and one needs to go to it with a clear brain and a relaxed and rested body. I always have a nap before a performance, so that I start my playing as well rested as I can be."

TELLING THE STORY TO THE AUDIENCE

At the point where you are walking out on stage, you have already spent a great deal of time and energy in physical and mental preparation, so go out and enjoy the process. This is the point where you get to share with the audience all that you have experienced and have found wonderful about the music. My own overarching principle for both physical and mental preparations is to remember to strive for excellence and not for perfection; this will help to keep failure at bay. 🎵

See www.pacificharpinstitute.org for even more tips and resources!

THE GLISSANDO

A PUBLICATION OF THE PACIFIC HARP INSTITUTE

EDITOR: Claudia Jensen

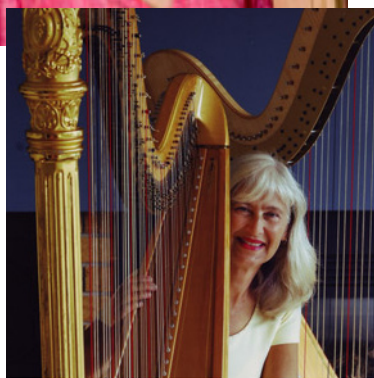
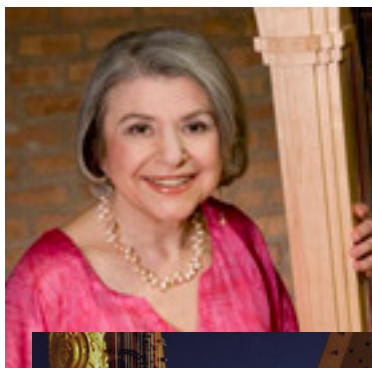
DESIGNER: Ruth Mar

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when I wasn't working on solo repertoire, and this warmup turned out to be ideal for developing technique in my students." (Her daughter, in the *AHJ* interview, notes wryly that "what Mom thought of as 'coasting' would be considered by many quite a driven and successful career.")

Judy was the long-time principal harpist of the Toronto Symphony, and she emphasizes how important orchestral playing is to a harpist, especially because they "do not have such a wide and outstanding repertoire as other instruments. I probably learned more just listening to the orchestra, watching and listening to the conductors and great soloists, and feeling the different styles [of music] than from any other thing I have done" (*Harpa* 2000). This is the special focus of one of Judy's students, Elizabeth Volpé-Bligh, principal harpist of the Vancouver Symphony and a favorite teacher at last summer's camp. Elizabeth returns this summer to share her own approaches to performing, especially in the realm of orchestral playing. Her website (<http://www.elizabethvolpebligh.com/articles.shtml>) offers good-humored and intensely practical advice for students faced with the challenges of the orchestral harpist.



"Edit impossible passages," she says. "If a part contains ten-note chords, stretches that require hands the size of platters . . . chord jumps that should be in the Olympics . . . don't be a hero! Just find a way to get the right effect, with the correct harmony, rhythm, and line, and everyone's happy." She also

recommends a few specific sources for the orchestral harpist, including Beatrice Schroeder Rose's *The Harp in the Orchestra* as well as the chat forum at www.harpcolumn.com – chances are that someone has figured out your mystifying score or fingering problem already and will be happy to share with you. (The Musicians' Wellness column in this issue has more of Elizabeth's advice, and see

also the material we've posted on the PHI site, at <http://www.pacificcharpinstitute.org/>.)

Faye Seeman, another of last year's favorite teachers, has created tremendous opportunities in chamber work with her Kithara Trio, and she also maintains an active teaching schedule at the University of Northern Illinois and at Wheaton College. At camp she will be sharing her experiences in building a chamber ensemble and its repertoire. She herself is largely responsible for arranging the music played by the Kithara Trio, and she describes their painstaking work in establishing their ensemble in Chicago and the Greater Midwest. First of all, she explains, "I adapted my favorite piano solo and piano trio music to suit the needs of the



LEFT (TOP TO BOTTOM): SUMMER SESSION I FACULTY JUDY LOMAN AND ELIZABETH VOLPE-BLIGH; ABOVE (LEFT TO RIGHT): FAYE SEEMAN AND RUTH MAR

trio. Then, after arming the group with a substantial amount of excellent repertoire which showcases each instrument, we spent many hours rehearsing before scheduling concerts. We made contact with many musical organizations in the Chicago area to build a reputation for interesting and exciting performances, and we researched possible recital and concert venues, along with advertising in trade journals and magazines in search of playing opportunities. Most important were our individual connections to other musicians, sponsors, and references in the musical world." Faye offers her students these important skills in arranging and in non-traditional music, especially jazz and improvisation (one of the highlights of her appearance at last year's PHI Summer Camp); see her website at <http://www.niu.edu/Music/about/bios/fseeman.shtml>.

As Alison Austin emphasizes, these websites are crucial sources of information for students, who need to focus not only on selecting and preparing their repertoire, but also on the intricacies of the audition itself: the availability of recording equipment; access to harps and practice rooms; and scheduling introductory lessons and master classes. Another of last year's instructors, Yolanda Kondonassis, has an especially detailed set of directions and advice on her own website (<http://www.ykharp.com/faq.html>) that underscores the necessity of long-term planning and preparation. In fact as Alison said, seeing Yolanda's detailed list of FAQs was one of the inspirations for the focus of this year's Summer Session.

Ruth Mar, another of our instructors and a familiar face from all of PHI's previous summer camps, studied with Judy Loman at the Royal Conservatory and is currently studying at the University of Washington with Heidi Lehwalder. She brings to our students her perspective as a young harpist entering the world of competitions and auditions. How does she prepare and how did she make the decision to enter competitions in the first place? "I decided to enter the Israel competition as a way to push myself to improve musically," she says. "I suppose it's similar to why people try for marathons or any other endeavor that takes lots of sweat and time – it's hard work, but with the proper preparation can be extremely rewarding. The repertoire for Israel was also music that I thought was worth learning in the long run. I've also tried, with the help of my teacher Heidi Lehwalder, to plan for smaller performance goals (other competitions, recitals, etc.) leading up to the competition."

Of course ultimately, as all our instructors agree, successful

performance boils down to focused and consistent preparation. Judy Loman emphasizes that true preparation means that the students have to be “present” at their practice sessions from the outset. “Their ears, their hands, and their brains have to be fully engaged,” she says. “This is a difficult task, especially when they have gone through the learning process and the piece is memorized. It is very easy to start playing automatically, which can have dangerous repercussions in performance.” Elizabeth Volpé-Bligh echoes this warning in the advice she gives on her website: “Be aware of exactly what you are playing!” she writes. “To prepare for an important concert, I practice both my right and left hand separately and memorize them so that I can literally play them in my sleep. (I pretend to read them off the ceiling.) Most people are only concentrating on the melodic line, and when they are out there in the bright lights, they suddenly notice their left hand wandering around the strings on auto-pilot.” She adds that Judy always told her students that “you have to learn your music 200% and have it ready at least three weeks before your performance.”

All this advice underscores the importance of deep and conscious preparation and practice sessions, not just focusing on showy passage-work but on a clear understanding and analysis of each piece. This starts from the minute you open the score; as Judy Loman says, “I suggest looking at the music before practicing it, reading through and planning the levels of the colors and dynamics in the mind, seeing what will be the louder and the softer passages in the piece, and then working and basing all the rest on these two extreme points. Make an interesting piece and still respect what the composer has indicated” (*Harpa* 2000). In the *AHJ* interview, Judy elaborates on her conception of technique: “Technique is not just virtuosity, but what the hands can do to allow you to realize what you want musically. To me,

the one who has a fantastic technique and can play twenty times faster and louder than somebody else is of no use if he is not able to make music with it.” The most important thing, she says, “is to be very respectful of everything that is on the page, not just the notes, but every written instruction and every dynamic marking. Very often, the piece will unfold easily when these instructions are followed.”

For the performance itself, Judy describes her own teacher’s approach. “Salzedo refused to let me say that I was nervous . . . he was very positive and would not allow negative thoughts, but coached me to always think highly of my future performance outcome, and to do the work that would support it.” In the *Harpa* interview, she added that from Salzedo she learned “to be free to express myself for every dynamic in every technique and to use mental tools so as not to be worried about performing in public.”

One of the highlights at camp this summer will be Judy’s solo recital on July 29 at Bastyr College. Her program will include transcriptions of works by J. S. Bach and Domenico Scarlatti; Glenn Buhr’s *Tanzmusik: 5 Pieces for Solo Harp*; Manuel de Falla’s *Spanish Dance No. 1*; Germaine Tailleferre’s *Sonate pour harpe*; and Salzedo’s *Variations sur un Theme dans le Style Ancien*. The program demonstrates her long commitment to promoting and performing new music for the harp. This too is something she learned from Salzedo. “I think one of the foremost aspects of Salzedo’s mind was to bring the harp into the twentieth century. He encouraged all his students to play contemporary music, me too, and when I came to Toronto I just followed through with that.”

We also have a full roster for the Summer Session II camps, which are geared toward younger students. As Alison explains, “We have many returning students for Session II, and as they come back to us we want to create new challenges for them. We will be dividing into two levels and running side-by-side camp experiences for this group.” There will be an emphasis on harp ensemble (including some duos and trios) and chamber music for the more advanced players in Session II. Again we will enjoy the teaching and musical skills of Elizabeth Volpé-Bligh (who taught at our Session II last year) and Faye Seeman, who will offer our younger students the opportunity to learn about improvisation. We are also delighted to welcome back another of our wonderful teachers, Susi Hussong, who, as Alison says, “will be leading the students with the Dalcroze teaching methods as they learn the complexities of jazz and ragtime rhythms, all the while maintaining that wonderful singing melody line. And all of this will be accomplished with their bodies and not their harps!” Naomi Kato joins us again to bring her special skill in working on musicianship with the younger students, and Ashley Wong, who has been with PHI since harp camps began, will be the assistant director of the younger campers. She has many surprises in store for them, and a special added concert event.

It is this long tradition of excellence in performance and in teaching that each of our instructors, in their own ways and in their own fields, will bring to our students this summer. As Alison says, the work begins in the practice room but does not end there. With a clear understanding of goals and with the highest standards in mind, PHI students will be able to put into action Judy Loman’s most basic advice. As Ruth said, ultimately what Judy told her students was that “at some point, you just have to trust that you’ve put in the work and then go out there and play.” The goal of PHI’s 2009 Summer Harp Camp is to make this a reality for its young harpists. 🎵



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Musicians' Wellness: The Art of Recital Preparation

DEBORAH L. PIERCE | CONTRIBUTING WRITER

RECITAL PREPARATION CAN BE A complex, multifaceted, and very personal topic, and many books and articles have been written on the subject and countless workshops and lessons have been focused on this process. Although each student will most likely settle into their own set of techniques that seem to fit their needs, all musicians need to include both physical and mental preparation in their practicing and pre-recital routines as well as developing a long-term model for physical and mental wellness. We have been exploring some of the resources available for this preparation in recent issues of the *Glissando*

and will continue to do so in future columns. Here are a few things to consider as you prepare for a recital or public performance:

CHOOSING REPERTOIRE

Many music teachers recommend that you choose pieces which are not too technically difficult for you. You want to be able to focus on interpretation and on bringing the best performance possible to your audience with the best experience for yourself. Or, as Elizabeth Volpé-Bligh puts it: "At least one or two pieces should show off your technique, but do not choose anything that stretches you beyond your limit. Don't torture yourself

and the audience with an uncomfortable performance." (See Elizabeth's full list on the PHI website.)

WARM UP AND COOL DOWN

Be sure to remember to warm your body up before practicing and performances as well as the important and often forgotten cool down at the end. Judy Loman observes that in that final warm up immediately before the performance, "it is often preferable just to warm up without too much strength on the pieces you are going to play, especially the first one. By the time one gets to a performance, ones hands are in such good shape that a big warmup is often not necessary, and will just tire you out for the job at hand."

LEARNING THE MUSIC

Pace yourself so you have adequate time to learn the music as part of a progression leading up to a performance. Or, to quote Elizabeth Volpé-Bligh again: "Cramming is very unreliable." Giving yourself extra time will not only allow you to work on your interpretation and understanding of the piece and build your technical abilities, but it will also help prevent injury. Also be sure to include some part of technique building into all of your practice sessions, along with incorporating critical ergonomic breaks to prevent physical problems.

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