

the company's first-ever music director in 2003. His long-standing association with the SFCMF began 11 years ago, conducting works by Varese and Stravinsky. At the August 5-6 concerts Schoenberg's challenging, crucial Chamber Symphony No. 1 (1907) was the main event; and Gilbert conducted his 15 instrumentalists in a compelling reading of that landmark.

Schoenberg had heard the Austrian premiere of Strauss's *Salome* the year before; he knew that score well. So it's not surprising that whiffs of Strauss's uncanny modulations and tonal ambiguities should appear in the Chamber Symphony. There are traces of Wagner in the Tristanesque Adagio, but the work is utterly original, dangerous in its musical brinkmanship. While largely tonal, it teeters on the edge of complete atonality and presages Schoenberg's break with the high romantic tradition. Gilbert's account of the work was definitive.

Gilbert returned to Schoenberg at the August 8-9 concerts, now with the composer's Chamber Symphony No. 2. Begun and largely completed in 1908, then revised and finished in 1939, this two-movement work is more grandly symphonic than the earlier one. 27 instrumentalists filled the stage at St Francis Auditorium, their concentration palpable.

After a moody, multi-textured opening, the first movement expands into strong exchanges between the several instrumental choirs—a precarious balancing act. In the concluding movement, marked *con fuoco*, *lento*, a deranged waltz appears (a dozen years before Ravel's *La Valse*), achieving a shattering climax before disappearing into an end-of-the-world finale. Again, Gilbert and his world-class ensemble supplied an unforgettable performance.

Gilbert's trifecta concluded August 12 with Strauss's lengthy, neglected Sonatina No. 1 for 16 wind instruments. Almost Mozartean in its lithe, smiling elegance, this late work (1943) mirrors many of the composer's earlier pieces and, in particular, his final opera *Capriccio*. For mellow good humor and brilliant ensemble effects, there's nothing in the composer's canon to quite match it. The grinning, foot-stamping ovation that his 16 musicians gave Gilbert told it all.

For its grand finale on August 20, the festival went back to basics. The all-Schubert program opened with Denk, violinist Benny Kim, and cellist Lynn Harrell performing Trio No. 1. Then Harrell joined the Tokyo Quartet, and deftly, magnificently, the 40th season floated to an end with Schubert's ineffable String Quintet. And with ticket sales at an all-time record last summer, the future looks very bright indeed. ✧

American Record Guide

# Orcas Island Festival Turns 15

## Two Heggie Premieres Triumph

Melissa Bargreen



When the big white and green ferry noses its way through a seascape dotted with green islands to the Orcas Island dock, you enter a new world with a different time zone. You're on Orcas time now, pausing to drink in the vistas from every direction: rocky seascapes, rolling hills and wide valleys, dark green forests, little boats chugging past in quest of adventure or salmon (or both).

August visitors usually keep an eye on the clock, though, because they don't want to miss any of the start times for the Orcas Island Chamber Music Festival ("Classical Music with a View"). The creation of violinist-violist Aloysia Friedmann and her pianist-husband Jon Kimura Parker, the festival celebrated its 15th anniversary in August with the kind of imaginative and venturesome programming that has drawn great performers and eager audiences to the island every summer. This year the lineup included two world premieres by Jake Heggie, works in many forms (including jazz) inspired by Paganini's Caprice No. 24, an intimate song evening with Frederica Von Stade, and a free concert on the Village Green with two pianos (Parker and Orli Shaham) and instruments with a program extending from *Carnival of the Animals* to a set of Broadway show tunes.

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Friedmann, as artistic director and chief architect of the festival, excels at the “why not?” school of programming that embraces all sorts of instruments, genres, and styles. You never know whether you’re going to encounter a harpsichord or a bandoneon, a beloved senior-citizen artist or a fresh-faced youngster. And if *The Four Seasons* is on the program, it’s likely to be by Piazzolla and not Vivaldi.

Over the past 15 years, the Orcas Festival has assembled a veritable kaleidoscope of programs and events—quite a change from its more casual Labor Day weekend opening concerts back in 1998. It was a family-and-friends enterprise, born during visits to the Friedmann family’s summer home in a tiny waterfront community on Orcas Island. Reveling in the scenery and in their happy experiences over the years at the older, larger Seattle Chamber Music Festival, Friedmann and her then-boyfriend Parker decided to present a few small concerts with musical friends. Her family was emphatically on board: her violinist father, Martin Friedmann, was a longtime mainstay of the Seattle Symphony’s first violin section; and her mother, Laila Storch, was oboist of the *Soni Ventorum Wind Quintet* at the University of Washington.

The concerts promptly sold out, and to meet the community’s demand the festival grew a little, especially when floods of mainland music lovers caught wind of what was going on (Lynn Harrell, Chee-Yun, Frederica Von Stade, PDQ Bach-Peter Schickele) and began trekking northward. But the festival didn’t grow too much. Friedmann and Parker never intended to rival the larger Seattle one, where they met as fellow performers and fell in love; the Orcas venues are much smaller, and the organizers have wanted to keep intact the homegrown feeling of the island community. They’re very careful not to spoil what they’ve created by overinflating it. There’s a happy buzz about the festival as the volunteers dash around, opening their homes for parties, taking the artists out for whale-watching boat rides, baking treats for the participants at “Music Lovers’ Seminars”, and serving up the free post-concert appetizer buffet for all the concert-goers.

After the post-concert reception, all the artists and administrators sit down to a sumptuous catered dinner in an adjacent room, where chefs outdo themselves in culinary presentations based on local ingredients—a seafood bisque flavored with homegrown dill, for example, and a fruit crumble with just-picked berries.

Over time, the festival moved away from Labor Day weekend to a less cramped and busy time span (the 2012 dates were Aug. 9-25) that allows for a lot of enhancements. Thanks to a grant from Chamber Music America, the

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Orcas Islanders are on the move, presenting “hamlet concerts” in tiny community centers around the island and venturing offshore to the neighboring island of Lopez for an evening with the festival’s 2012 resident Miro Quartet.

The high points of the festival’s 15 years are too numerous to list, but among the most striking innovations was the 2004 presentation of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* with Parker and Anton Nel at the piano, dancers from the San Francisco Ballet interpreting the ballet with a backdrop screen where previously-filmed dance scenes were interwoven with real-time close-ups of the pianists’ hands in action. That one was sold out so long in advance that Friedmann decided to open the rehearsal for a nominal fee and was promptly stamped by eager attendees.

You never quite know what you’re going to encounter on Orcas, whether it’s Alp horn calls summoning the audience to the little theater, or the thunder of Bach’s Toccata and Fugue in D minor, or a theatrical performance of Michael Daugherty’s *Dead Elvis* lighting up the house.

And then there was the year when they brought together the legendary 97-year-old filmmaker-photographer Otto Lang (1908-2006), pianist Claude Frank, and commentator Gerard Schwarz for a discussion and presentation of Lang’s film *Beethoven: Ordeal and Triumph* (in which Frank, who also played the piano in that evening’s program, had starred as Beethoven).

Or how about the 2009 debut of *Craigslieder*? That was a quirky and entertaining song cycle by Gabriel Kahane, based on anonymous ads from [www.craigslist.com](http://www.craigslist.com). The same season also was the year of the animals: each program started out with an animal-themed piece, from Gershwin’s ‘Walking the Dog’ and Copland’s ‘Cat and Mouse’ to Kahane’s *Django: Tiny Variations on a Big Dog*.

All these novelties, alongside the “usual suspects” of the chamber music festivals (all the Brahmses and Beethovens and Schuberts, and the ever-popular Mendelssohn Octet), keep audiences and performers alike on their toes and well entertained. So did the second outdoors concert this season on the Village Green in Eastsound, the island’s little central hub of a town, where residents brought their blankets and lawn chairs in for a festive light-classics program (with narration by children’s author Jack Prelutsky and Broadway songs sung by baritone Rod Gilfry) that was free for all.

Over the years, world premieres are a fixture at this festival, and 2012 was no exception with two brand-new works by opera composer Jake Heggie (whose opera *Moby-Dick* was also represented with an aria sung by Gilfry). Heggie wrote an affectionate tribute to Friedmann

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and Parker, with each of them on two instruments: Friedmann on violin and viola, and Parker on piano and harpsichord. Called *Orcas Island Ferry*, the four-movement suite captured what Heggie called “the sense of journeying out on a crowded ferry and then arriving someplace magical”.

Heggie’s brand-new song cycle, *This Is My Beloved*, got a tremendous performance from Gilfry (who sang the challenging 20-minute work without a score), accompanied by the composer at the piano and two other instrumentalists, violinist Andres Cardenes and cellist Anne Martindale Williams. Based on a book of erotically charged poems by Walter Benton (1907-76), the song cycle (like the book) traces the arc of a love affair from the first rush of joyous emotion to the lonely resignation of the end.

Heggie chose PG-rated excerpts from some of the free-verse poems to set to his wonderfully descriptive music. The opening song moves edgily forward and then erupts into a full-blown tango; the second is an idyllic succession of dreamy, reverent chords that ideally support the text, as the lovers “move closer to heaven”. Later, at a less optimistic point in the cycle, Heggie underscores the foreboding with spare, repeated notes that almost recall the opening of Ravel’s ‘Scarbo’, as it finally devolves into a wild instrumental tarantella underneath the singer’s despairing lines. As the love-affair text and music begin to fade, the soloist hums the closing theme. Once again, it was clear that Heggie is at his very best with voice and text; and it is hard to imagine a better exponent than Gilfry.

A pair of charming flute-based pieces opened the program: CPE Bach’s Trio Sonata in B-flat and Mozart’s spirited Flute Quartet in D (the former with Parker at a harpsichord that was built in 1963 by his father-in-law). Both of these works displayed the agile, expressive, and beautifully centered sound of flutist Lorna McGhee. (Both pieces have extra-musical associations too: Friedmann’s parents recorded the CPE Bach piece together in Salzburg in 1957 as newlyweds, with Laila Storch taking the flute part on the oboe. And McGhee and the evening’s violist, her husband David Harding, first met while performing that very Mozart quartet.)

The evening’s finale had Gilfry and Parker performing Schubert’s ‘Death and the Maiden’ followed by the great *Death and the Maiden* Quartet, whose second movement was inspired by it. The Miro Quartet explored the full expressive range of this death-obsessed work, concluding with a finale whose fierce energy drew gasps and riotous applause. ✧

## Music@Menlo at 10

### Vision on Target, Performances Varied

Jason Victor Serinus

It’s hard to believe that just 10 years ago, Music@Menlo, one of America’s most important summer chamber music festivals, began in earnest a few miles from the Stanford University campus. The year before, on August 3, 2002, a single-day pilot program took place at the Menlo School, a beautiful private campus on the gated grounds of a former estate that serves as the festival’s home.

Even in the first year, the essence of the entire three-week program that Artistic Directors David Finckel (cellist) and his wife Wu Han (pianist) had envisioned was already in place. A workshop for young musicians, open master classes, a young listeners concert, an AudioNotes CD, main-stage performance by some of the superb artists who return annually, and a recording by Da-Hong Seetoo were just some of the festival’s components.

“To say we’ve ‘evolved’ is not really the right word”, Artistic Administrator Patrick Castillo explained between concerts. “We came out of the gate really strong, and we’ve merely grown into more of who we are. We’ve expanded the artistic family and the breadth of offerings, but the caliber of musicianship—the ‘what’—remains the same.”

Castillo points out that M@M’s Chamber Music Institute, which currently nurtures 40 young musicians annually and includes an international program; young performers program; master classes free and open to the public, cafe conversations, prelude performances by young international artists, and the Koret Young Performers Concerts, all existed in some form from the beginning. Even repertoire was “conceptualized” back then with season themes (this year’s was “Resonance”) and concert themes.

When I mentioned to Castillo that an audience member I encountered this year expressed concern that so many aging music lovers return year after year that there’s little room left for newcomers, Castillo dismissed his fear by noting that, in order to accommodate large audiences, M@M added a new venue, the Center for the Performing Arts at Menlo-Atherton, in 2010. Note, however, that the largest venue for this extremely important festival accommodates only 492 people. Consider the issue unresolved.