

Old Dominion University Libraries



Newsletter

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JOHN DUFFY COMPOSERS INSTITUTE AT THE DCR

The third annual John Duffy Composers Institute convened this past May 14 – 28 in the Diehn Composers Room of the University Libraries. The Institute is truly a unique endeavor on the part of the Virginia Arts Festival, the sponsor, and is a great opportunity to support the development of new composers. The Institute has also been a wonderful introduction for these new composers to the materials in the Diehn Composers Room's general and special collections.

THE INSTITUTE'S EARLY HISTORY

Many will recall the early versions of the Composers Institute, before Mr. Duffy's participation. Looking for ways to meet its educational mission, the Virginia Arts Festival in 2003 developed a 4-day workshop with the well-known minimalist composer Philip Glass to create mentor relationships between new and established composers.

Virginia Arts wanted to do more, however. The organization had a goal of "cultivating ties with young artists as well as audiences, and of expanding its ongoing relationships with area arts and education organizations and their constituents" (November 2004 press release from Virginia Arts Festival). Finding a master composer to direct this effort would be crucial.

Rob Cross, the director of the Virginia Arts Festival, knew he had found the right person to lead the new Composers Institute in John Duffy. Mr. Duffy, a two-time Emmy award winner and composer of over 300 works, had been a guest speaker at an Insider Insights lecture for the festival. It became clear to Mr. Cross that this man, a founder of New York State Council on the Arts *Meet the Composer* organization, was profoundly interested in educating a new generation of classical composers. Virginia Arts invited Mr. Duffy to be the Institute's master composer for 2005 and at the same time, expanded the 4-day workshop idea into a 2-week Institute that brought talented

young composers together with internationally-known composers and with on site student performers.



Robert Cross, Director, Virginia Arts Festival, and
Roseann Runte, President, Old Dominion University

A collaborative effort from the beginning

Even in the early stages, the Diehn Composers Room was a participant in the educational goals of the Institute. Rob Cross, Jean Major (then University Librarian), and Dennis Zeisler, head of the Music Department at ODU, collaborated on planning the 2003 workshop, for which the Diehn Composers Room created an exhibit entitled "Philip Glass: A Synthesis of Music and Film." Virginia Arts Festival followed in 2004 with a master class and lecture at

Old Dominion University featuring Chen Yi, whose works are a unique synthesis of Chinese and Western classical forms of music. Library staff likewise presented an exhibit on Professor Chen's work entitled "Translations and Transformations: The Compositions of Chen Yi."

From 2005 to the present, the University Libraries and the Virginia Arts Festival have worked closely to create an educational environment and performance and rehearsal venues worthy of the staff and students of the John Duffy Composers Institute. The Diehn Composers Room provides the main classroom and workshop space, and the exhibits have served as a visual reminder to students that their works are becoming part of a long history of human musical creation.



John Duffy

FROM PEN TO PAGE TO STAGE: THE 2007 INSTITUTE

The 2007 John Duffy Composers Institute was an extraordinarily intensive educational opportunity for Institute Fellows to study and hone their skills and compositions. Classes included writing for the voice, writing for string quartets, composition analysis, and staging. Established composers such as Anthony Davis (*X, the Life and Times of Malcolm X*; *Tania*; *Amistad*; *Wakonda's Dream*), Lee Hoiby (*The Tempest*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Beatrice*, *Summer and Smoke*), and Old Dominion University's own Adolphus Hailstork (*Rise for Freedom: The John P. Parker Story*) delivered lectures on their musical dramas. Every Fellow met both independently with Institute faculty members Patrick Mason (voice), Rhoda Levine (dramaturgy), and John Duffy, and in groups with all participants. There was also study and homework. Fellows prepared comparative assignments on how different composers chose to set

the same story, such as Bernstein's *West Side Story* and Hoiby's *Romeo & Juliet*. Every day was rehearsal; every night was reworking, revising, re-thinking the score.



Fellows and performers relax during the reception

The Institute was not all work, however. The University Libraries hosted a VIP reception and exhibit that stimulated conversation and admiration from Duffy and all the Institute participants.



Anthony Davis and Rhoda Levine talk about Davis's opera, *X, the Life and Times of Malcolm X*.

The reception featured a talk by Anthony Davis, a composer whose latest opera, *Wakonda's Dream*, and other works won him a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship this year. Mr. Davis spoke at length about the creation and staging of his first opera, *X, the Life and Times of Malcolm X*. His energy and enthusiasm about the production and about working with Rhoda Levine made for a fascinating evening. Institute Fellows and performers later took turns at the Diehn

piano and kept the energy flowing, delighting everyone with standards from the musical theater. It was a thrilling event and an unforgettable experience for young, talented composers and musicians alike.

FROM PEN TO PAGE TO STAGE: THE EXHIBIT

The exhibit, *From Pen to Page to Stage: Reflections of American History by Contemporary Composers*, is based on the idea of staging history, the Institute's general theme for 2007. Embracing America's pre-colonial, colonial and national past, the exhibit examines late 20th-century opera and musical theatre plots that set in motion real American people and events. Compiling a list of operas and musicals based on American history, both north and south, it was discovered these historical plots divided themselves neatly into four themes: *Ghosts and Dreams – Plots that Integrate Past with Present; From the New World to a New Nation – Plots from the 16th-18th centuries; Oppression and Liberation – Plots from the 19th century; and Politics – Plots from the 20th-21st century*. All operas selected for the exhibit are part of the University Libraries' circulating collection, including scores, albums, CD's, and books. Each theme is showcased individually and is illustrated through photographs and books of the persons or events, photographs of the composers, original scores and recordings, and photographs of the various stagings. Collages made for the exhibit to depict the history-based operas and musicals further illustrate the stories' historical impact by their color, shape, order, and relevant pictorial selections. Many of the names are familiar, such as the 1959 Pulitzer Prize winner, *Fiorello!*; Tony award winner, *Evita*; and the infamous *Lizzie Borden: The Musical*. Some operas were later made into movies such as *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, *Amistad* and *Dead Man Walking*, which won three Academy Awards, including Best Song. The exhibit features many important figures that will be recognized for their humanitarian contribution like Harvey Milk, Harriet Tubman, and Susan B. Anthony. Other names are remembered because of the unexplained tragedy they left behind:

Stephen Sondheim's opera, *Assassins*, about the United States presidential assassinations and assassination attempts; John Adams' opera, *The Death of Klinghoffer*, based on Leon Klinghoffer, who was shot and killed by terrorists while in his wheelchair; and *Tania*, based on the kidnapping of publishing heiress Patricia Hearst. The exhibit also features works composed for Jamestown 2007 by Institute faculty members John Duffy, Anthony Davis, and Adolphus Hailstork, as well as Jennifer Hidgden and former Institute faculty member John Corigliano. The exhibit can be viewed in the Diehn Composers Room, or on line at

www.lib.odu.edu/musiclib/exhibits/FromPentoPage/index.htm



'From Pen to Page to Stage' exhibit

We look forward to continuing the collaboration between Virginia Arts Festival and Old Dominion University Libraries, as we enhance the cultural life and educational possibilities open to the community. If we give young classical composers this kind of experience, they will doubtless give back to us both enriched lives and a record of their work for future generations to enjoy.

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