

Making Music Together

Community-based musical groups rely on Andrews musicians to make beautiful music

by Chris Carey

Preachers and teachers and generals have known it for centuries: Music brings people together. It unites musicians with each other and joins audiences with performers, moving all in the same direction.

And music is one of the elements that puts Andrews University in touch with the larger community in southwest Michigan.

"The university tends to be a world unto itself. When I was an undergrad, 25 or 30 years ago, I worked at Schrader's Super Market and there was Berrien Springs and then there was Andrews. They were like separate entities," said Professor Dennis Waite, who teaches psychology in the School of Education and sings and plays the guitar with the Riversong Music Society.

"I don't think that division is quite as marked as it used to be. People here are becoming more involved with more community activities, and it gets that nice dialogue going between the university and permanent members of the town. I think Andrews has a lot to gain from Riversong in becoming more accessible to the community."

Waite and several other Andrews staffers and students take tunes to town through Riversong, a loosely organized group dedicated to spreading folk, bluegrass, blues, gospel and related music. At a recent Monday night Riversong gathering in a combination coffee shop and travel agency in Berrien Springs, Waite plucked and sang two John Prine songs,

"Yes, I Guess They Ought to Name a Drink After You" and "The Accident," and wound up with an instrumental version of "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

Waite organized Adventism's first rock and roll gospel band when he was a student. Now he joins with bagpipers, harpists and fiddlers in spreading America's down-home music.

Riversong is at one end of the musical range covered by groups that are more or less related to Andrews.

At the other end, performing music of the Renaissance and Baroque periods from the 15th to 18th centuries, are the Andrews University Early Music Ensemble and Opus Nine.

Somewhere in between is the Amherst String Quartet, a nationally recognized group that includes three Andrews faculty members who perform classical chamber works from the time of Haydn and Mozart down to such 20th-century masters as Shostakovich.

The eight musicians of the Early Music Ensemble play mostly recorders, with

some percussion and the occasional crumhorn thrown in. The crumhorn, a J-shaped wooden tube with a bleating sound much admired by King Henry VIII, is a contribution of Bruce Closser, a professor in AU's English department who is the only member left from the time the ensemble was organized in 1987. He built a set of crumhorns (alto, two tenors and bass) from kits, then built an unbent one from a table leg.



Jack Stenger observes Dennis Waite's technique at a Riversong gathering.

The ensemble was created by Wolfhard Touchard, a reference librarian at the James White Library, who has since moved to playing the trumpet and leading a youth band at Pioneer Memorial



Members of the Early Music Ensemble rehearse in Hamel Hall. From left: director Wendy Willis, Jean Bartz, Debbi Parker, Erika DiBiase, Lynn Bayley, Bruce Closser

Church. The group is led now by Wendy Willis, a flutist who also teaches at Notre Dame, St. Mary's College and Lake Michigan College, instructs some 50 private students in her home, and performs with the Southwest Michigan Symphony Orchestra.

Most of the ensemble's other members, several of them retirees, come from the community at large, not from Andrews, and play for the love of it. "These people are amateur musicians, and they just make great music," Willis said. "They are so enthusiastic that I have to hold them back. They want to make a Web page and cut a CD. They want to play at every opportunity, do everything."

The ensemble performs six to 10 times a year, at Andrews, at Christmastime madrigal dinners at St. Mary's College in South

Other than paying Willis a token salary, supplying a small sum for sheet music and other expenses, providing rehearsal space, and offering credit to players in its life-long learning program, Andrews puts little into the ensemble. The benefit to the school outweighs its contribution.

"We're getting out into the community and we're playing, representing Andrews," Willis said. We're letting people know that Andrews is involved in continuing education. Most of our people are older community members. We go out there and people see that these are not young college kids. I think older people in the community say, 'Oh, I could do that.' It sends a message that continuing education is a good thing and is available at Andrews."

For Closser and perhaps others, there is a spiritual dimension as well. "Somebody produced that music a thousand years ago," he said. "There's a sense in which that person is alive right now because we're playing that music. We are coming as close to God's ability to make something over again,

Joseph, and a music teacher and performer from Benton Harbor.

Opus Nine grew out of the now defunct Pro Musica group and performs its Renaissance repertoire several times a year at Andrews, at area schools and churches and elsewhere.

Opus Nine has no direct connection with Andrews, but the indirect connection is significant. "For Julie [Lindsay] and myself, as faculty members, it's one of our professional outlets," Mack said. "This music that we contribute to the community also helps us with our own musical growth."

Musical growth for Andrews itself was one reason for the creation of the Amherst String Quartet six and a half years ago.

"Usually a music department decides that they need a string quartet and it attracts string teachers with salaries," said professor and first violinist Carla Trynchuk, the quartet's leader and its only original member. "This happened the other way around. I thought it was necessary to have the quartet here, but the department wasn't ready to fund it.



Opus Nine members rehearse at the home of Linda Mack. Mack is at the harpsichord. With her are James Kraus, music director of First United Methodist Church in St. Joseph, and Asta LaBianca, music teacher and wife of anthropology professor Øystein LaBianca.

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Bend, at the 1839 Courthouse Museum in Berrien Springs and elsewhere.

One of the ensemble members, Lauren Matacio of the James White Library's technical services department, also plays with a modern quartet called the Silver Flutes. It's not related to Andrews, although all four of its members are. "I think Andrews serves as a catalyst, providing the environment which encourages things like this," she said.

bring it to life, resurrect it, as we ever will in this world."

Like the Early Music Ensemble, the vocal group Opus Nine draws both from Andrews and the community. Its members include Linda Mack and Julia Lindsay, both of the music department, plus the wife of an AU professor, a lawyer and a church music director from St.

"I started it for two reasons. I wanted to participate in quality chamber music. And I wanted to pass that along to my students. Bringing in fine musicians is our best foundation for a solid string program for Andrews.

"Three of the four of us teach here at Andrews, and I think one feeds the other. It's very important for our students to have teachers of this quality. We can't



Carla Trynchuk and Nicolas Orbovich practice for an Amherst String Quartet concert at a church in LaPorte, Indiana

afford to have four salaried string teachers, so this is the next-best thing."

Little by little, the quartet has solidified its place in the Andrews system. The school has added the quartet's second violinist Nicolas Orbovich and cellist Stephen Framil as part-time faculty members. The fourth member is Igor Fedotov, who teaches at Western Michigan University and is principal violist for the Kalamazoo Symphony.

The quartet performs all over the United States, from Berrien Springs and Three Rivers to New York and Texas. And all four members have busy solo schedules. Trynchuk recently finished a West Coast tour, and Framil performed earlier this year in India, the Philippines and Hong Kong.

Resident string quartets are not common on university campuses. Yale University and the Juilliard School in New York each have one, but such musical powerhouses

as the University of Michigan and Indiana University at Bloomington do not.

"Quartets are tricky," Trynchuk said.

"They're very complex. Piano trios are easier to put together, the combination of instruments is easier to work with. The greatest chamber music literature is written for the string quartet, but it's the hardest to perform."

And for some people, hard to enjoy.

Classical music, much of the core of Andrews' highly regarded music program, is "a bit high-church," in the words of Waite, the psychologist-guitarist with Riversong.

Riversong's kind of music, Waite said, "is much closer to the ground."

"The real pleasure of music, I think, is when you can do things that you want to do without having to worry about making a

living at it," said Jan Burda, a Berrien Springs guitar maker and teacher who got Riversong rolling and who organizes its summer festival in Grove Park, its weekly hootenannies at the travel agency cum coffee shop, its monthly song-sharing sessions and other events. Burda also brings folk and related music to elementary schools in the area.

Eryka Nelson, an AU sophomore in music education who plays the fiddle and the guitar and whose father directs a gospel-bluegrass band, teaches 30 violin students at Burda's shop and often plays at Riversong events.

"I think it's valuable to have Riversong because it gives Andrews students the opportunity to experience this kind of music, to be influenced by it, to take them away from rock," Nelson said. "And it's valuable to Riversong to have Andrews here, a whole population of young people.

Lalessa Sims, who graduated this spring

with an AU degree in English, plays the Celtic harp at Riversong events.

"I see Riversong as an escape, in a way," Sims said. "It's nice to get into another mode, to go off campus and do something, even if it's just up the road."

She would welcome more Andrews students and staff to participate in Riversong events, but would not like too close a connection. "If it were on campus, it would become another one of those campus things," she said, "and we have plenty of those."

Jack Stenger, who until this summer was Andrews' public information officer, is also a Riversong guitarist and would welcome more university participation.

"Adventists are church-going people so they're accustomed to pianos, organs, orchestras, violins," he said. "So when we see instead a guitar player and an upright bass and a fiddle, it's fun. This music is just infectiously melodic. It's not an acquired taste."

Stenger thinks everyone should join in.

"Every parent should be obliged to require their children to play the guitar because it's so much fun, it's so easy, and it's so portable," he said.

"Anybody can play a guitar. Elvis Presley conquered America with three guitar chords. We can all learn three guitar chords."

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