

Thoughts On A Fiftieth Anniversary

from David Kornreich, Board president

We approach our fiftieth anniversary with equal parts astonishment, gratitude and pleasure. Having been on the Board for about half that time, my heart and mind are filled with thoughts and memories.

You, our loyal Friends of Music, know that it is rare for any arts organization to survive, let alone thrive, for this long. Of course you are the primary reason it has done so. My first thoughts go to George Raymond and our other foresighted and courageous founders. We have endeavored to continue their original concept of presenting the world's finest chamber music in a local hall at affordable prices in a friendly atmosphere. Only the number, size and artistic scope of our concerts has changed. We thank our former Board members and my predecessors. We've tried to build on your achievements.

Lucky us, living in a "golden age" of chamber music. Choosing from the available artists would be daunting if we gave sixty concerts a year instead of only six. Selecting the artists for this special year was a tremendous challenge for our Programming Committee. As always, we wanted to present musicians who possess the highest levels of artistry. We charged the Committee with the task of selecting "great moments" from among our seasons past.

But how to choose only one piano trio from among the four or five who have played for us in recent years? We felt there was one group whose dynamic performances had made a slightly greater impact on our audiences than others, and so we chose the Kalichstein/Laredo/Robinson Trio.

Choosing a solo pianist was very difficult. A dozen great names were considered. We chose someone we believe combines great interpretive power, exquisite finesse and an amazing range of repertory. His recent Friends concert was compelling, and the fact that he is an artist with roots in Westchester made our choice of Garrick Ohlsson particularly appropriate.

Who among the marvelous violinists we have presented should be our choice? Again, six or seven names were proposed and again we felt one particular artists had given so memorable a concert for us that we wanted to invite him back for this occasion. Hence, Gil Shaham.

No more difficult a decision existed than selecting a string quartet. The astounding number of world-class quartets that have graced our stage in only the past ten years confirms that we have fulfilled our mission. The passion, balance and musical intelligence of several have attained for them a very special place in the hearts of our audiences. From those we chose the always powerful, elegant Emerson Quartet.

For one concert we decided to feature a work beloved by our audience but not frequently performed. Our search for an ensemble that plays the Mendelsohn Octet brilliantly (and many other works as well) led us to invite Concertante to make its Friends of Music debut during this special season.

Our last concert involved a different kind of choice. Two years ago Board member Bill Altman proposed that for our fiftieth anniversary we commission a new work. The Board agreed, and, as a result, the esteemed composer Richard Danielpour is composing a string quartet that will have its *world premiere* at our May 1, 2004, concert. Mr. Danielpour chose the Guarneri Quartet to perform it, and we are delighted to welcome these fine artists back after a long absence. They will make his new work the cornerstone of their program for us.

After receiving kudos from all of you following their very fine debut performance last November, members of the twenty-plus-years-old Vermeer Quartet gave out kudos in return, which I am happy to pass on. They said that our audience was “astonishingly good” and mentioned your attentiveness, responsiveness and evident musical knowledge. Because those of us fortunate enough to speak to the artists have heard similar comments frequently, we were gratified but not surprised. For your artistic appreciation, your support – in every sense of the word – and your loyalty, all of us at Friends of Music Concerts thank you for our first fifty years. We think we’re beginning to get the hang of it. The next fifty should be even better!