



THE SOCIETY OF COMPOSERS, INC.  
NEWSLETTER XXXIII:1

## FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES

2003

### Region VI Conference

February 13–15, 2003  
Henderson State University in  
Arkadelphia, Arkansas  
Host: Phillip Schroeder  
schroep@hsu.edu

### Region V Conference

March 6–8, 2003  
Macalaster College  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
Host: Dr. Carleton Macy  
macy@macalester.edu

### Region VIII Conference

April 11–12, 2003  
Central Washington University  
Ellensburg, Washington  
Host: Mark Polishook  
polishoo@cwu.edu

### 5th National Student Conference

November 20–22, 2003  
University of Miami  
Miami, Florida  
Host: Fred De Sena  
fdesenna@miami.edu

Visit the SCI Web site:

<http://www.societyofcomposers.org>

*Competitions, entry fees,  
judgement, and the cost of  
being a composer in America*

*by Bruce Bennett*

The month of December saw a dramatic increase in activity on the SCI members listserv. An initial posting by an anonymous individual, [Moondancey@aol.com](mailto:Moondancey@aol.com), sparked a flurry (fury) of responses on the subject of entry fees for composition competitions, judging, and the cost of doing business as a composer in America.

“Competitions really suck when you pay for postage and entry fee and everything and then they don't award you NOTHING or even give you the feedback you at the very least deserve on your piece. You guys know what I'm saying? The people that judge these things probably only have degrees and don't know anything.”

*Moondancey@aol.com*

It turns out that Moondancey is not a member of SCI. Gerald Warfield, General Manager of SCI, thought that Moondancey might have hacked into the listserv, but DataRealm (the server host) tells us Moondancey unsubscribed shortly after sending the message. We still don't know who they are—perhaps someone that had been purged from the database for nonpayment of dues, but had remained on the SCI members listserv. Too bad they unsubscribed, I'm sure they would have been interested to see how the thread they started with a crude airing of frustration grew into a lengthy and passionate debate—of which the significance to SCI's membership quickly became apparent.

I myself have been on both sides of the entry fee debate. I often send my music out to calls for scores and composition competitions, though I seldom submit my work to competitions requiring an entry fee. However, I

*“Entry fees” ...continued on page 6*

*SCI Region VII Conference  
October 2002*

*by Bruce Reiprich*

Hosts: Bruce Reiprich, Tom Cleman,  
Greg Steinke

Three days of clear blue skies and clean mountain air greeted the participants of the SCI Region VII Conference, 10–12 October 2002, held at the School of Music of Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona. With Saturday afternoon set aside for personal sight seeing, participants took advantage of the excellent weather to golf, hike the San Francisco Peaks, visit historic sites, wander about the south rim of the Grand Canyon, or stroll among the streets of Sedona and Jerome. In addition to a banquet held at the quaint and historic Weatherford Hotel in downtown Flagstaff, lectures by Marshall Bialosky and Stuart Hinds and six concerts of music representing very diverse aesthetic viewpoints were presented. Performances by visiting artists (Genevieve Chinn, Hideko Fujiyama, Cheryl Hart, Jonathan Helton, Martha Krasnican, Robert Spring, Keith Sweger, and Stephen Thomas) and Arizona State University's New Music Ensemble (Glenn Hackbarth, director) along with those by NAU faculty and large and small NAU student ensembles were enthusiastically received by audiences of consistently substantial size. The following composers were performed: Lawrence Axelrod, Brian Bevelander, Marshall Bialosky, Elliot Borishansky, Scott Brickman, Allen Brings, Tom Cleman, Judith Cloud, Paul Epstein, Glenn Hackbarth, Stuart Hinds, Marvin Johnson, Andrey Kasparov, Deborah Kavasch, Frank LaRocca, James Lentini, Carleton Macy, John Marvin, Timothy Melbinger, Douglas Ovens, Ernesto Pellegrini, Mark Phillips, Daniel Powers, Bruce Reiprich, Jody Rockmaker, Steven Roens, Rodney Rogers, Christopher Shultis, Rob Smith, Greg A. Steinke, Eleanor Trawick, Ken Ueno, Donald Reid Womack, Byron K. Yasui, and Eric Ziolek.

## ***The Society of Composers, Inc.***

The Society of Composers, Inc. is a professional society dedicated to the promotion of composition, performance, understanding and dissemination of new and contemporary music. Members include composers and performers both in and outside of academia interested in addressing concerns for national and regional support of compositional activities. The organizational body of the Society is comprised of a National Council, co-chairs who represent regional activities, and the Executive Committee.

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***Have you considered  
becoming a  
lifetime member of SCI?***

Become a lifetime member of SCI  
today, and enjoy the benefits of SCI  
membership forever!

## MEMBERS' ACTIVITIES COLUMN

Please email current information on your activities to:

**SCI Newsletter**  
**Bruce Bennett, Editor**  
newsletter@societyofcomposers.org

### Elizabeth Austin



On November 25, The University of Jena, GERMANY will sponsor an all-Austin piano concert, featuring Jerome Reed, pianist. Premieres that evening will be: *ROSE SONATA* for piano solo *AN AMERICAN TRIPTYCH* for piano solo *A CHILD'S GARDEN OF MUSIC* for piano solo

On December 12, Austin's *GINKGO-NOVO* will be premiered in Weimar,

#### Visit our Web page

**Tom Lopez**, assistant professor at Oberlin Conservatory, is our webmaster. The URL is:  
<http://www.societyofcomposers.org>

Please visit the Web site and send comments and suggestes to [webmaster@societyofcomposers.org](mailto:webmaster@societyofcomposers.org)

GERMANY by the PianOVo Trio (English horn, cello, & piano).

### David Heuser



David Heuser had two works appear on CDs recently, *Cauldron* for orchestra, recorded by the Bowling Green Philharmonia, Emily Freeman Brown, conductor, on the CD "New Music from Bowling Green, Vol. 2" on Albany Records (TROY490), and *Deep Blue Spiral* for saxophone and tape, recorded by Jeremy Justeson (alto saxophone) on the CD "Juggernaut" on Equilibrium (EQ49).

His *Elegy, September 11* was recently performed by the St. Cloud State University Philharmonic Orchestra. Also, after a performance in San Antonio in October of Cúchulainn's *Warp-Spasm*, for speaker, computer music and effects, reviewer Mike Greenburg, writing for the San Antonio Express-News, wrote, "the piece is just plain compelling. It fully and effectively conveys the dark, violent, monstrous atmosphere of the text."

"Members" ...continued on page 4

#### Alert!

If you teach in a department or school of music, please ensure that concert programs presented by your university are being collected and sent to ASCAP and BMI each on a regular basis. Each agency, which relies on these programs, extracts performance information and determines the amount of royalty credited to each composer based on a sample rate.

## The SCI Newsletter

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SCI Newsletter  
Bruce Bennett, Editor  
941 Dolores Street #2  
San Francisco, California 94110  
(650) 731-6367 (voice)  
[newsletter@societyofcomposers.org](mailto:newsletter@societyofcomposers.org)

*For other business:*  
Gerald Warfield, General Manager  
Society of Composers, Inc.  
Old Chelsea Station, Box 450  
New York, NY 10113-0450  
[secretary@societyofcomposers.org](mailto:secretary@societyofcomposers.org)

[www.societyofcomposers.org](http://www.societyofcomposers.org)

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## SCION

David Drexler, *Editor*  
Daniel Powers, *Asst. Editor*

SCION, SCI's on-line electronic news, provides information on opportunities for composers. News items, announcements, comments, and other material for publication may be sent via e-mail to:

[david@drexlermusic.com](mailto:david@drexlermusic.com)

Mail, telephone calls, and fax messages should be directed to:

David Drexler, *SCION Editor*  
653 Charles Lane  
Madison, WI 53711  
Telephone (home): 608-238-4284

## Sean Hickey



New York—Weill Hall, the chamber music space of prestigious Carnegie Hall, will be the setting for performances of two piano works of New York composer Sean Hickey, performed by pianist Eleonor Bindman on January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2003. Ms. Auer will perform Hickey's evocative *Dolmen*, a work she has performed numerous times, most recently at Columbia University. *Hill Music: A Breton Ramble* receives its premiere at Weill as well, a piece partly inspired by the sweeping grandeur of Nova Scotia's Cape Breton Island, and written specifically for Ms. Bindman. She will also perform music of Chopin, Rachmaninov, and Prokofiev. ("...Ms. Bindman conveyed [the] shifting world of tension, humor, gracefulness and fire with impressive clarity of purpose and a full grasp of the music's restless spirit." Alan Kozinn, *The New York Times*) In addition, a concert of Hickey's chamber music will be presented at Cami Hall, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2003, also in Manhattan. Weill Hall is located at 57<sup>th</sup> St. at Seventh Avenue, in Manhattan. Cami Hall is located at 57<sup>th</sup> St. at Seventh Avenue, directly across the street.

Born in Detroit, Michigan in 1970, Sean's earliest music education began at age 12 with an electric guitar, a Peavey amp, and a stack of Van Halen records, the early ones of course. He studied jazz guitar at Oakland University, later graduating with a degree in composition and theory from Wayne State University. His primary instructors were James Hartway and James Lentini.

Relocating to New York, Sean has pursued further studies with Leslie Bassett, Justin Dello Joio and Gloria Coates. His works include two string trios, a string quartet, a flute sonata, a woodwind quintet, several pieces for solo instruments, church as well as orchestral music. He has also worked on a film score and composed the music for a children's play, the latter of which received over 80 performances. Sean is also active as an arranger, contributing arrangements for various artists and ensembles in the pop and jazz music spheres. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife Catherine.

His principal instruments are guitar and piano. Sean has composed upon commission *Runes and Alphabets* for Philadelphia-based ensemble *Ars Futura* and was named a semi-finalist in the Auros 2001-2002 Composition Competition. The past year has seen performances in New York, Washington DC, Portugal, Ireland, and Turkey.

Currently, Sean works as a territory manager for Naxos of America, Inc., the world's premiere classical music label, while pursuing freelance writing in music and travel, as well as composition. Several of his recording and concert reviews may be found in the pages of the *New Music Connoisseur*, *21<sup>st</sup> Century Music*, *Modern Dance* and numerous other publications. He is also a principal contributor to the forthcoming *MusicHound Guide to Classical Music*.

### Jeffrey Hoover

*Latin Steps*, for violin and piano, was performed by Rachel Barton and Matthew Hagle on the Illinois Central College Subscription Series on November 8. Rachel Barton also performed *Chiaroscuro*, for unaccompanied violin. Barton had previously performed *Chiaroscuro* on a radio and international Internet broadcast at WFMT Chicago.

London-based GÉNIA (UK) gave the premiere of *My City* for piano, tape, and videopainting on the Arts and Ideas series at Lewis University,

Chicago, IL, November 8. *My City* was also performed by GÉNIA on November 10 at the ICC Performing Arts Center, East Peoria, IL. The videopainting for the composition was also created by Jeffrey Hoover, and is an outgrowth of his ongoing work in combining his paintings with his compositions in performance.

Duo Ahlert & Schwab (Germany) gave the premiere of *American Tango* for mandolin and guitar at the Kunsthof in Friedrichsrode, Germany on March 23, 2002. Subsequent performances of *American Tango* were for the Kulturförderverein Wetter in Gut Schede-Gosse Scheune, Germany, on September 8, and for Kulturkreis Impulse, August 11 in Gut Hagne, Freren, Germany.

The Shenandoah Valley Bach Festival and the Eastern Music Festival were both sites of performances of *Into the Night* for flugelhorn/ trumpet and marimba. Judith Saxton, flugelhorn/ trumpet collaborated with Michael Israelievitch, marimba in the Bach Festival Performance on June 19, Harrisonburg, Virginia. Christopher Norton played the marimba for the Eastern Music festival performance on July 9, Greensboro, North Carolina. At the performances, the poem *Into the Night* by Jeffrey Hoover was printed in the program and read from the stage prior to the performance. *Into the Night* was originally composed and dedicated to Judith Saxton.

*Into the Night* was also performed by John Almeida, trumpet/flugelhorn, and Jeff Moore, marimba in two concerts: February 13, Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina, and on March 18 at the University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida.

### Eva Wiener

*Homage to Braque* for solo guitar, was given its world premiere by Oren Fader on November 17<sup>th</sup> at the Ellington Room at Manhattan Plaza in NYC. The work was written for and dedicated to Mr. Fader.

## COMPOSER SCI's Streaming-audio Archive

Dear SCI Members:

I am writing to request submissions for COMPOSER, SCI's Streaming-audio archive of members' works.

For those members who are not familiar with COMPOSER or streaming-audio, the following FAQ (frequently-asked-questions) may be helpful.

### Frequently-Asked Questions

Q. What is streaming-audio and what's the purpose of COMPOSER?

A. Streaming-audio is a system to deliver audio from a server- to a client computer without the necessity of downloading files.

COMPOSER is a form of publishing for recorded music. It is a kind of clearing-house, an archive where recordings of SCI-members' compositions are stored, encoded in streaming-audio form, available for listening on a properly-equipped computer with internet access, anywhere in the world.

Q. What kind of platform does COMPOSER reside on?

A. A Sun UltraSparc computer running Solaris.

Q. What exactly do I need to access COMPOSER?

A. An internet-connected computer with sound capability, running Windows, MacOS, Linux, Unix, or other operating systems; an internet browser such as Netscape or Explorer; plus a software player, RealPlayer from Real Networks.

Most Windows PC and Macintosh computers nowadays come with audio cards, and many packaged systems already include browser software with software player plug-ins already installed.

Q. If I don't have the player software, where do I get it, and how do I install it?

A. The software player, RealPlayer, is available for free from Real Networks.

[http://www.real.com/player/index.html?src=010709realhome\\_1](http://www.real.com/player/index.html?src=010709realhome_1).

The free player is RealPlayer 8 basic in the fine print on the left, a little more than halfway down on the screen. This URL changes from time to time. If this link is broken, go to [www.real.com](http://www.real.com) and navigate to the downloads section.

Q. How do I install RealPlayer on my system?

A. The installation is simple and straightforward. If you need help, the link <http://service.real.com/help/faq/rp8/rpb8gen.html> is very helpful.

Q. How do I access COMPOSER?

A. Point your browser to COMPOSER by clicking on the link <http://composer.sss.arts.ohio-state.edu>. If you forget the link, a search-engine inquiry with the keyword `composer` will get you there.

You will see the welcome screen with links to the SCI home page, and an ENTER COMPOSER link which you click on to enter the archive. Once inside, you'll see a list of composers on your left, and some other links on the right to sources of information, downloads, and other programs.

Simply click on the name of the composer whose works you wish to listen to. You'll be taken to that composer's page, with the composer's name at the top and optional biographical material and program notes below.

Click on the composer's name to hear the work. RealPlayer should launch immediately and establish a connection with COMPOSER. If not-if you receive an option to download an unknown type of file, you probably haven't installed the RealAudio plug-in for your browser.

Q. What about audio quality?

A. The audio quality you experience is a function of the speed of your internet connection. Files on COMPOSER are encoded at four rates: 28KB/s, 56KB/s, Single ISDN and DSL/Cable Modem. Audio quality varies depending on speed of your connection from FM-radio- to near-CD-quality. Of course, the quality of your monitor loudspeakers plays an important factor as well.

Q. Why Real Audio? Why not IceCast, QuickTime, or some other CODEC (encoder/decoder) ?

A. Simply because Real Networks, with an estimated 200 million Real Players installed, is the most popular system in use now. As technology develops, we may include other CODECS on the site.

Q. How do I submit my work to COMPOSER?

A. Send your recorded material (CD or DAT tape—no analog audio cassettes, please) to:

Tom Wells, Manager  
COMPOSER  
The Ohio State University School of Music  
1866 College Road, Weigel Hall 110  
Columbus, OH 43210

Alternatively, you may FTP soundfiles to us. Contact Tom Wells at [wells.7@osu.edu](mailto:wells.7@osu.edu) for details.

There is a 15-minutes-duration-per-composer time limit. How to fill that time—with one composition or several—is the choice of the submitter.

Include any biographical information and program notes (preferably in .html form) with your submission-on CD, a separate cassette, or by e-mail to [wells.7@osu.edu](mailto:wells.7@osu.edu).

Graphics files may also be submitted in .jpeg, .pict, or .tiff format.

*"Composerver" ...continued on page 6*

"Composer" ...continued from page 5

Although COMPOSER is well known in web space from the e-mail I receive and number of recorded hits, the site is underutilized: only about 10 percent of SCI members have contributed. Internet audio is a great way to get your music in front of people—which is one reason we all are in this business.

I look forward to receiving your submission. If you have any questions, e-mail me at wells.7@osu.edu and I'll be happy to help.

Sincerely,

Tom Wells, SCI President  
Manager, COMPOSER Streaming-Audio Project

### **New SCI Journal of Music Scores Volumes 32 and 33**

Volumes 32 and 33 are hot off the press!

#### **Volume 32:**

*Entre Funerailles IV*  
by Mark Applebaum

*Aqua*  
by Sabang Cho

*Veraenderungen*  
by Joel Feigin

*Amanha e Amanha e Amanha...*  
by Jack Fortner

*An Die Musik*  
by Jason Haney

*Strata 2*  
by Charles Nichols

#### **Volume 33:**

*Michal*  
by Andrey Kasparov

*Breale, Blowe, Burn*  
by Lansing D. McLoskey

*Sonata for Bassoon and Piano*  
by Robert Paterson

"Entry fees" ...continued from page 1

will pay an entry fee if I think my work has a reasonable chance of being given serious consideration, both because I believe in the piece and I believe the piece will be appealing to the particular performers or judges involved in the competition.

It helps to know to whom you are submitting your work. Research the ensemble and review their past programming and the winners of past competitions. An ensemble that performs primarily avant-garde, modernist music may not be the right ensemble for your neo-romantic, tonal sonata; likewise a group that performs mostly minimalist music might not be terribly interested in your masterpiece of new complexity.

As a board member of a new music ensemble, I have helped organize and judge a composition competition that requires an entry fee. This fee helps fund not only the cash prize for the competition, but also the performance and associated administrative fees. No new music group is profiting from these fees, but they do help offset the costs of producing concerts—they must, funding for new music in the United States is limited.

Adjudication has been an honor and a privilege. I try to be fair to each piece and give them all equal consideration—however, I inevitably have my own criteria for what differentiates great music from good music, and good music from bad music, and certainly not everyone will agree with my judgement. It is no small task to choose the one from the many. I have been fortunate to review many fine works, of great aesthetic variety, not only from around the country, but from around the globe. Several works submitted for the competition have found their way onto subscription series concerts even though they did not win the prize. After the winner is chosen, the prize awarded, and the concert is over, the audience and the critics will be the last to judge the piece and the jury's decision.

Entering a composition competition (regardless of an entry fee) has its benefits even if you don't win. The most important being that your music is being put into circulation. Judges of competitions will give your work careful consideration, and a good piece will make an impression whether or not it wins a prize.

In the interest of archiving (and, hopefully, stimulating and continuing) this debate, several postings following Moondancey's original post are reprinted here with the permission of the authors.

#### **Selected SCI listserv postings:**

"I do agree that entering competitions is very frustrating when you are told that in order to make a name for yourself, you have to enter as many as humanly possible and hope someone notices you. Having to copy music, pay for postage, AND an entry fee is tough for people just getting started, who don't have much money to begin with and who are dealing with student loans. It is also unfair to think that sometimes personal preference can get in the way of judging. For example, if someone loves twelve tone music, and you send them the best Bach fugue ever written, a good, but not great twelve tone piece would probably win.

HOWEVER, I do think that these judges have a very tough job to do, and no matter who they choose, they will wind up making someone who didn't win mad. The system could be better, but then again, what system couldn't? Entering competitions is unfortunately just one of the many frustrations that come with being involved in music. I do think it would be more fair if they'd give you feedback and let you know why they didn't pick you. I'd like to think that the reasons why they don't are because of time, and not for any ridiculous, unknown reasons."

*Joseph Adams*  
recent graduate from New York  
University's music composition program

"Now that the discussion has relaxed from the initial gripe, I have some comments.

From a practical point of view:

1) If you are keeping detailed track of all the expenses involved in the business of making music, then yes, the cost of copying music and sending it to contests is a business loss reportable in the expense section of Form SE and Schedule C of Form 1040. But do keep detailed records of expenses spent, royalties earned, awards won, etc., and keep them in your files for at least 7 years, if you're going to do this.

2) It may help to look at contests as opportunities to get your work looked at—even if just with a cursory glance—by people who have actually expressed an interest in looking at that kind of music. Whether your music wins or not, it gets a bit of very narrowly focussed exposure to your target market. Whether that is worth the cost of copying, mailing, and entry fees or not is up to you. For most of us, winning occurs rarely and may appear to occur on grounds that have nothing to do with the quality of the music (it may reflect a match between the music and the competence of performers selected to play the music, or a stylistic bias in the judges, or any other number of things). The purpose of entering contests is to market your work to the kinds of people who judge the contest. Winning is just a bonus which may get you even more exposure to others."

*Matthew H. Fields*

<http://personal.www.umich.edu/~fields>

"As someone who has been on all sides of the composition contest controversy (winner, loser, judge), perhaps I can add a little information from the judge's side, which is currently being questioned. I have served on national judging panels and finalist judging panels many times, and can report the following:

At the highest levels, finalists (say 20 out of 500–600) are all competent and

worthy. If two scores are judged equal in musical value, judges will often grasp at straws to break a tie, e.g.: I saw one score eliminated because of poor manuscript (a xerox copy of a pencilled original, loose pages stapled) on the grounds that the composer wasn't ready for professional encouragement if he couldn't present a professionally prepared score. The advocate for this particular piece (a Pulitzer Prize-winning composer himself) was outvoted by the rest of the panel because of the reasons stated. Less defensibly perhaps, I also saw a well-written orchestral score rejected because it was deemed "too conservative harmonically," in a field that drew equally good scores deemed "more adventurous and imaginative." So style does count with some panels. Similarly, if there is a duration limitation specified, submissions exceeding that limit by even a minute will sometimes be rejected if the judges are swamped with entries and determined to eliminate as many as possible for rules infractions so that they will have more time to choose among the finalists. Rules may also be bent if a judge with strong convictions can persuade the rest of the panel to do so. (I have never seen anything but musical motivations behind this, however—never anything political or personal.)

When it comes to selecting pieces for performances, usually at conventions or conferences, the judges are at the mercy of the performers who have volunteered (or are even being paid, in some cases). Performers will often reject a fine score if they think it will take more rehearsal time than they can manage. The more difficult the work, the harder it is to find good performers. Again, good score and part preparation are important. I've seen scores for large ensembles reduced to such small dimensions that they were virtually illegible; and worse, performers were sometimes expected to play from these reduced scores.

There is a direct correlation between the quality of the manuscript and the quality of the performance (or non-performance if the parts are judged

too user-unfriendly). Often scores that do not appear to be professionally notated and printed or are too hard to read will be rejected in the first cut. ("Professionally notated" doesn't mean accepting all the defaults of programs like Finale, some of which are inappropriate; composers are advised to check standard references like Heussentamm or Read on proper notation, part preparation, etc. This is also what publishers expect, since they now want camera-ready copy from their composers.)

In some contests, allowances are made for age. For example, the BMI contest often awards a prize to a very young composer, teenage or less, deemed worthy of encouragement but not expected to show the maturity of, say, a 24-year old contestant. :-)

Contests aren't really the same as a "random throw of dice," but entrants shouldn't put too much faith or hope in them. Write the music you want to write, and if a contest comes along that seems to fit its dimensions, then send it off. But it's usually a waste of time and psychic energy to write a piece just for a contest that you wouldn't otherwise have written.

Finally, judging panels change all the time, along with whatever biases and prejudices some judges may bring with them. "If at first you don't succeed..." etc."

*David Ward-Steinman*

"I am in agreement with what my old friend David Ward-Steinman says about competitions. I too am a veteran of a large number of contests. I have judged a lot of such things, and want to share some insights I have gained.

Most judges say they are not stylistically biased, and most believe they are not, but in fact most are. Most cannot help it. In many competitions, judges change every year or every few years, and when that happens the list of winners often tilts in one stylistic direction or another.

I have seen well-respected composers reject works because they are too melodic, or not melodic enough, or atonal, or tonal, or too much like Babbitt, or too much like Copland, etc.

I have seen a panel of judges go wild for a particular piece, and then seen another panel absolutely hate the very same work.

I have seen responsible judges, and I have seen irresponsible ones—such as the well-known composer who asked me what I thought of a large opera submitted because he/she did not want to bother going through the whole score. Or such as the equally well-known composer who said that he/she could tell within 20 seconds of looking at a piece how good it is. Or the one who never looked beyond the first page of the score, because he/she could tell all he/she wanted to know from that page. Or the composer who insisted on awarding a composer a prize because he/she would have a nervous breakdown if he/she did not win.

I often tell my students that they should enter contests only if they can do so with little emotional investment. If they are going to be devastated every time they lose, they probably should not enter. I tell them that losing means only that a certain small group of people on a certain day felt a certain way about their piece. A contest does not really say much about the quality of a work, which is an exceedingly elusive value. It just says something about how the work seemed to the judges at the moment. So, I tell the students, it doesn't mean much when you lose. But it also doesn't mean much when you win. Winning does not mean you are a great or even a good composer. It only means that you won a contest.

Many competitions end up giving awards to works that are least offensive to the judges. When a judge is passionately in favor of a work but another judge is passionately opposed to it—as can often happen with novel, original, or controversial works—that work rarely wins any recognition. Competitions judged by vote or by

consensus can often end up rewarding bland competence over searing originality.

Also, many competitions have hundreds of entries, so no one entry really gets enough of the judges' attention. And those looked at when the judges are tired tend to suffer.

I can affirm everything David said about quality of manuscript and playability of the parts often being factors as well.

So, each composer should decide for him/herself whether or not to enter a competition. Whether there is an entry fee, how much it is, and how it is used (if that information is available) may well influence you. Sometimes you can lose a competition but still impress one of the judges, and this can be good for your career. But it is best to think of competitions as games. Some people have better gaming skills than others. If you think of entering in this way, rather than as seeking some kind of validation of your art, then you are more likely to survive the inevitable series of thin letters. After all, in every competition there are far more losers than winners."

*Jonathan Kramer*  
*Head of Composition*  
*Columbia University*

"I'd like to add one more observation, coupled with a piece of advice, to the ongoing discussion about composition competitions. In my experience, judging committees often work in the following way: an applicant's recording is put on for all to hear, while following scores. As judges feel they have heard enough, they raise their hands. Once three hands are in the air, the recording is stopped. That is all the listening the applicant's music will receive.

Particularly after the panel has been listening for some hours, pieces that start soft and/or sparse and/or pulse-less become tedious to hear. Even judges who normally favor soft, sparse, and/or pulse-less styles in their own compositions or in their choice of music to listen to, tend to

find such music tedious late in the day. The recording may never get as far as the Allegro (if there is one coming) before three hands are in the air. By contrast, I have seen an upbeat, rock-inspired work enliven a tired group of abstract modernist atonal judges toward the end of what was seeming to them to be a long, dreary afternoon of atonal Adagios.

If the music you want to enter begins in this understated way, you may save your entry by providing the panel with the option of hearing a carefully chosen excerpt from later in the piece. You can do this by putting this excerpt on a separate track of a CD or on a completely separate CD or tape, and by marking the score very clearly as to where the excerpt begins. Do not place such an excerpt far in on a tape, however, as I find that committees rarely will take the time to sit through a fast forward. Furthermore, different tape machines' counters do not agree, so it is often difficult and time-consuming to find a taped excerpt that is not at the beginning of a cassette (DAT timings are reliable, but many committees do not have access to DAT players). If you are submitting without a recording, you might bind or at least mark the score so that the passage to which you wish to draw the judges' attention is readily accessible.

If you feel that your piece cannot be fairly excerpted, that one has to hear the entire piece or nearly the entire piece to gain any real understanding of what it is trying to do, then this piece is probably not a good one to enter into a competition. I often feel that way about my own pieces, and hence am not surprised when they do not win competitions. Committees will sometimes consider an entire piece before deciding for sure that it deserves an award, but in my experience the vast majority of pieces are eliminated on the basis of three or four minutes' consideration."

*Jonathan Kramer*

"Having been both applicant and judge for many contests I am reasonably happy with the way these things are run. No one forces you to enter a



contest with a price tag, so avoid them if you chose. Or accept it and pay, happy that your money is going to help support an organization that encourages new music.

And when I have judged these contests it is usually very clear to me which are the best two or three works. I can dismiss 9/10 of the entries as being not as good as the others immediately. Usually a quick first glance at a score tells me all I need to know to rate it, though I will give them all equal examinations, listening and looking at every measure. Occasionally this deeper look will change my view, but not often.

If I were asked to comment on each one, offering reasons why it was not chosen, it would just serve to piss people off. After all, I assume you are not writing to win contests, but rather because you must write to continue to breathe. And if you are sincere in your endeavors then you probably would not adjust your style due to a comment from some judge."

*Terry Vosbein*  
*Associate Professor of Music*  
*Washington and Lee University*  
*Lexington, VA 24450*  
<http://www.vosbein.com>

">> Usually a quick first glance at a score tells me all I need to know to rate it.

> How so? How is this possible?

Well, I would say over half of the entries I have seen have abysmal copywork, either by hand or by computer. If a composer doesn't have the skill and desire to make a professional looking score, then they are not ready to be winning compositions. These works should not win. (The worst are the ones who use a notation program and think it will tell them what is the correct way to notate.)

Further, style does count (at least to me)... If a work is an incredibly well written Chopinesque nocturne (or replay of Tristan or Debussy), it shouldn't win either. These styles are over 100 years out of date, and if a

composer is only recreating a century old harmonic/rhythmic/melodic practice, it doesn't matter how good they do it, they should not win. (Imagine an art competition where a copy of the Mona Lisa won.)

Judges by their very nature use personal preference. I don't think any judge would say "This is the best piece" but rather "I think this is the best piece" with the emphasis on "I"

So I will bypass strict minimalist works. I will bypass works that seem complicated for the sake of complication. I will select works that "to me" demonstrate professionalism and creativity. And this is usually a small percentage of the applicants.

Is this fair? I think so. That is why there are several judges in each competition, to smooth over each person's personal taste and come up with a balance."

*Terry Vosbein*

"I mean this in the spirit of friendly debate and I hope it's taken as such.

I have to disagree with Terry on most of his points. I do agree of course that it behooves composers to make the most professionally looking score possible, for the sake of putting the best face on their good efforts. But as a judge (as I have had to be for a couple of small score calls) I am less inclined to use neatness as a criteria. I realize this is a common way of weeding out entries and I don't know what I would do faced with a mountain of scores (I need more judges, would be my first thought). But the psychological challenge of creating music that is a well-defined personal language (which means it is likely foreign to most people, including judges) is so great a hurdle in itself that I am apt to be forgiving if the composer can't bring himself to be overly detailed or, by contrast, the composer is so fastidious regarding the score's appearance as to seem to be putting on airs (florid calligraphy, special symbols where perfectly good ones already exist, etc.). Beethoven, Caturla, Ives, and I'm sure legions of composers of all

generations, submitted scores to ensembles and publishers that were nearly illegible. Perhaps they were insane. I would not want to disqualify them.

And do we eliminate a Boulez (let's say, *Le Marteau*, or *Structures*) from a competition because he is complex for complexity's sake (which he certainly was)? Or a future Barber because his language is just so quaint? Of course a lot depends on the parameters of the competition, but if we're willing to allow the extremes to go by the wayside, it seems to me we are in opposition to the spirit of an open forum, and running the larger risk of promoting sameness.

I come down on the side of those that feel a quick glance at a score can't reliably give you enough information to judge it fairly. These things are a crap shoot, its true, but I would hate to think that we were overlooking contestants whose largest fault is a lack of marketing savvy."

*Carlton J. Wilkinson*

"<I firmly believe that the judges make decisions according to preference.>

Sometimes it isn't even the judges that are making the decision according to preference, it is the performers. I was recently rejected from an SCI regional conference (which I of course do not take personally, nor get worked up about). In the e-mail sent to me by the conference coordinator it was made clear that there was no "judging," the pieces were simply handed to performers and they picked which ones they wanted to perform. I'm not speaking to the validity of such, I'm simply pointing out another way in which conferences are run.

As for feedback on "why my piece was not chosen;" I can not say that I am really interested in hearing why. I am the one that chose to enter the competition, and I did so knowing that my work may not be chosen. That said, I am also confident in my music. Winning or losing a competition does not, for me anyway, speak to the quality of the work, but simply to the

"mesh" of resources at the conference site in regards to the requirements (whatever they may be) of the piece submitted. "

*Joseph Dangerfield*  
*Student Representative SCI*  
*Theory Assistant/Research Assistant*  
*University of Iowa*

"1. I have judged SCI, SEAMUS, and state arts commission composition competitions over the past 20 years.

2. I have never, repeat NEVER, gotten paid for this function (one lunch). Nor did anyone else that I know of (except for transportation reimbursement).

3. I always viewed my role was to evaluate to the best of my ability the merit of each entry regardless of style, instrumentation, or performance possibilities.

4. Judging has elements which are subjective. Any discussion about submitting a work 3 times before it wins makes perfect sense to me.

5. As most competitions stand now, the most one hears back is who won what prize. If you think that each work should be returned with a detailed judge's evaluation, let the competition know or boycott. Despite the inferences on this list, a meaningful evaluation (would a rating of 3 out of 5 in "Text Setting" or "Life of an Idea" help that much?) of each submitted work will greatly increase the time spent for the judges. The least time I've ever spent evaluating was 8 hours and that was for a competition where there weren't many entries. If I had to write an evaluation for each work it would have increased that time 2-3 fold. Most judges are NOT worried about being sued for their decisions. Most of us GIVE our time to the organizations which host these competitions. Personally if I had to write evaluations I would either not judge or request compensation. The latter would, of course, increase the entry fee.

6. Smoke em if you got em. Entering competitions is your decision. So is

informing the organization of your displeasure and/or boycotting."

*Glenn Hackbarth*  
<http://www.public.asu.edu/~glennh>

"As a composer who enters such contests, and as president of the League of Composers/ISCM, which runs such a competition, I can respond to this discussion of entry fees from two perspectives.

1) As a youngish composer, I do enter competitions with fees routinely. I guess my limit is around \$30 or \$40, depending on what's offered. I've spent more to apply for programs and residencies like Tanglewood, Wellesley, etc. I'm willing to spend more where there's a cash prize or potential commission than where there isn't. If all you can win is a title, then I don't bother, although I suppose another line on a resume is worth something, even if that's all it is.

I do not expect to make money this way, but at this stage I'm mainly interested in getting my music out there however I can. I know where the fees are going, and I don't mind. But I don't just enter everything, either. Many competitions have very high fees or burdensome application procedures, such as asking for several copies of scores or recommendation letters. I remember some European competitions I saw advertised, that between the costs of copying, mailing, entry fees, bank fees for international bank drafts, and other costs, would have totaled more than two or three hundred dollars to enter.

Also, I don't write music for competitions, especially if they want a piece written for some strange combination of instruments I could never get another performance of. I just look at what they're asking for, and if I happen to have something that fits, and the fee's not too much, I send it. Once in a while I win something.

2) As director of a new-music presenting organization, I have a another perspective. Our competition offers up to six winners the chance to have their

music performed in New York City by a world-class ensemble, and to be submitted to represent the US at a major international festival (the ISCM World Music Days). We would like to offer commissions, but so far we just haven't had the funds. Our fee is \$20 for the first piece, \$10 for each additional piece. Instrumentation is wide open, and it's strictly anonymous.

Yes, we keep the money raised from entry fees, but there's nothing underhanded about that. The fees go toward the substantial costs of performing the winning pieces. If you win, you definitely get more than your \$20 worth. If you don't, it's only \$20, and it goes to support new music at the highest level, which is ultimately in the interest of all composers.

I know some composers, on principle, say "I don't want to spend my money on someone else's performance." First, that's fine. No one's forcing you to. But second, why not? Do you not accept other people's money for your own performances?

I spend most of my time raising money for the League of Composers, so we can get today's composers heard. One thing I cannot do with that money is program my own music. On the contrary, our funders require us to be completely altruistic with the resources they give us. So I raise and spend thousands of dollars a year on other people's performances—in that context, to suggest that we're cheating people by asking for \$20 is kind of insulting.

The way I see the new music scene, we're all in it together. It costs a ton of money to put these concerts on, and the money has to come from somewhere. To me it seems only reasonable to raise some of it from composers, who have something substantial to gain by entering our competition, and who have a personal stake in the health of new music generally. And like me, plenty of composers seem happy to cooperate."

*David McMullin*

"Hello, I'm a freshman composer who entered a number of different compositions to about 8–10 different competitions/readings this fall. I've been kind of curious as to who judges the competitions and what exactly the judges are looking for when they sift through the entries. I'm finding some of the things that have been said on this subject interesting and I have a few questions and comments.

>If a composer doesn't have the skill and desire to make a professional looking score, then they are not ready to be winning compositions. These works should not win.

I agree 100% with this statement. In other lines of work, when you send in a resume you want it to look as professional as you can. It doesn't take that much longer to clean up a score on a computer anyway, only a few hours depending on the nature of the piece. As a person who is in the early stages of my career, I feel this is something that should be expected of me. Besides, I also think it can be used as a measure of how much thought and time a person has put into the work.

I agree to some extent with professor Vosbein's comments on the style of the piece he is judging. Most competitions in my opinion are in place to find new talent and originality. With that said, I do feel that if a composer takes some elements from different styles of music, fuses them together and puts their own little twists on it that it constitutes as originality. Beethoven draws upon his classical training in almost all of his pieces, but it's the fact that he takes some of those old ideas and puts his own twists in them that makes it sound like Beethoven. Would anyone agree with this?"

*Stephen N. Limbaugh III  
Freshman Composition Student  
University of Missouri Kansas City*

"Dear All, Well, I have finally decided to throw my hat in the ring on this subject. As far as judging on style I see a couple of problems. Yes, we as composers do want to see our art form

progressing and getting better, however I don't think in the last 40 years Art Music has done anything truly significant in its movement. I believe minimalism was the last large scale musical breakthrough. As far as a piece sounding a hundred years old I might point out that Art Music is not a straight line that just evolves in complexity, timbre, and techniques. In fact I would say our art form is a Pendulum, and really I believe we are heading in a back swing back to a sort of Neo-Romantic style. Whether this is good or bad I really can't say. I believe as a composer the most important thing to do is be honest to yourself and what you want to write. We must face the fact that people won't love everything. I know several composers whose music I don't particularly like, but yet still respect for the amazing amount of craft they have.

This brings me to my final point. If you chose to enter competitions don't expect to win. I believe each competition is purely subjective. I've had the same piece make it into the semifinals for the Tampa Bay Composers competition, that well known pro's enter, and had the same piece rejected for a SCI student conference. I enter so my music can be heard by others, and if it picks up an award that's great. Write music because you have the need to express something your words can't. If you are lucky others will appreciate it."

*Aleks Sternfeld-Dunn  
Senior At Cal State Hayward*

"Competitions are a means to what end?"

Perhaps the present system of competitions is counterproductive to the health of new concert music. Many students and "emerging" composers believe that winning competitions will somehow insure a positive future in this field. But isn't this focus on competitions overlooking a severe problem, which is sure to thwart everyone's possibility of a healthy and successful career in composition? The problem is simple: we have no audience. And with no audience we will have a grim future.

I have no problem with the existence of these competitions, and believe that many do intend to promote new music. However, composers need to be doing a lot more than writing music and sending pieces to contests. The problem lies in the oft-stated fact that this music genre is seemingly isolated and insular. Outsiders (those who don't write music themselves) feel too under-educated to understand, and therefore enjoy the music. I believe there are things that we, the composers, can do to ameliorate this feeling of ignorance.

There needs to exist something outside of the music—a dialogue—to serve as an entrance into the music. This dialogue starts with the composer. Many of us justly feel the need for feedback about our music to accompany the familiar rejection letter. Since many judges have written about the impossibility of this prospect, composers should instead swap scores with each other and discuss them. (Like what often goes on at workshops.) This discussion should bring issues of contemporary music to the foreground, and the least it will do is solve the no-feedback problem of competitions.

I volunteer to organize the swap. Please send me an email if you are interested in participating. I am imagining something as simple as pairing people up each month, having the pair exchange scores via mail, and then exchange feedback.

This discussion unto itself won't attract outsiders to the music, but it will create a dialogue so that when the music is approached there is something to latch on to. Once composers establish a higher level of dialogue about each other's music, it will transcend the brick wall that separates the outsiders. In this beautiful future, critics will no longer print stupid things, audiences will be fighting to get tickets, and new music will have secured a place in the ears of the public. Peace, love, and atonality."

*Juliana Trivers*

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