

Forfest *Continued from back page*

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best-known historical work for the peculiar combination of clarinet, viola, and piano. Like many titles added by publishers or others, *Kegelstatt Trio* has come to identify the work even though Mozart apparently was not making reference to the bowling game named by this title. In response, Rapoport explained how his work included embedded signifiers of bowling in each of the movements.

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orchestra works by Gideon Klein and Pavel Haas, two of the noted Czech composers imprisoned in the Terezín ghetto, both of whom died after deportation to concentration camps in Poland.

My second impression of Forfest was one of a deeper understanding of the wider significance and impact of the Festival. While the festival's commitment to contemporary music and art, and the connection of the arts and spirituality, had created a strong impression the previous summer, the living connection between the artists, composers, and performers who met at Forfest, and their continued artistic collaborations beyond the geographical and temporal confines of the festival, left an indelible second impression. The legacy of Forfest as an international locus for the presentation of new works that were created by artists who had first encountered each other there is magnified as these works reach audiences worldwide and join the canon of contemporary art. While the manifold cross-cultural cases are too numerous to convey here, examples range from American composer Theodore Wiprud's chamber orchestra work based on a painting by Czech artist Vaclav Vaculovič to Slovakian pianist Letňanová's Czech and Slovakian performances of works by Italian composer Messieri to the aforementioned interweaving of friendship and artistic collaboration as American performers Daniel and Dolly Kessner gave voice to new works by French and Czech composers Zourabichvili and Grossman. This far-reaching impact may be one of the lasting legacies of the festival, and Vaclav and Zdenka Vaculovič certainly deserve recognition for 25 years of creating a festival where contemporary art can flourish, and where artists become enriched through their connections with each other, and in turn, offer the world new art that may not otherwise have come to light. We celebrate the silver anniversary of Forfest, and wish it many more years of success in presenting new work to the public, and in providing an environment conducive to engendering artistic collaboration.

Laurence Sherr is Composer-in-Residence and Professor of Music at Kennesaw State University in Atlanta, GA

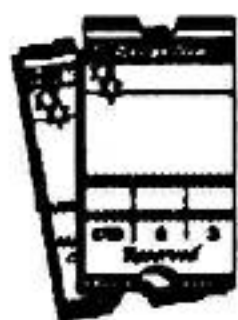
The opera *Tawawa House* by Zenobia Powell Perry was edited, reconstructed, and orchestrated by NACUSA member Jeannie G. Pool.

Premiere of Zenobia Powell Perry's Opera

by Deon Nielsen Price

“The opera was thrilling – the very first time I have ever been to an opera!” responded a young woman of color as we left the theater when I asked how she enjoyed *Tawawa House*. I had, myself, eagerly anticipated attending this premiere fully staged production of Zenobia Powell Perry's opera, reconstructed and orchestrated by Jeannie Gayle Pool and produced on May 2 and 4, 2014 by the Townsend Opera at the elegant Gallo Performing Arts Center in Modesto, California.

Concert Review



Throughout the opera the words and musical style reflect the social and geographical setting—a site on the Underground Railroad in the 1850's. The libretto and song titles include symbols of slavery—*Jumping over the Broom* (getting married), and escaping to freedom—*Follow the Drinkin' Gourd* (big dipper with north star). The historical Tawawa House was a hotel resort in Xenia Springs, Ohio, where freed and runaway slaves lived and worked, and white slave owners vacationed with their slave mistresses and children. The success of the resort was a result of the unusually collaborative relationship of whites and blacks. Disrupted and closed during the Civil War, it became Wilberforce College, the first African-American owned and managed university in the United States. Its graduates became key personnel and teachers in the establishment of colleges throughout the nation.

The powerful choral and production numbers caused many audience members to tear up. The marvelous voices of the soloists were superior and breathtaking. Each character sang with authority and deeply soulful understanding. I envision the same leading artists bringing this opera to receptive audiences through triumphant national and international tours.

The staging and musical direction, costumes, sets, and all dimensions of the production were professional and delightful. The orchestra sounded convincing and the orchestration supportive and colorful. The total length of the thirty-three titles performed was audience friendly but I would like to attend an indulgent future production that includes all forty-seven titles.

The composer, Zenobia Powell Perry, was born in 1908 to a well-educated family—her father a black physician and her mother Creek Indian. Many innovative and advanced musical passages in the opera reveal the influence of her extensive studies and assistantships with R. Nathaniel Dett, William L. Dawson, and Darius Milhaud. Perhaps her most poignant heritage was from her grandfather, a former slave who sang the Spirituals to her that she later wrote down and that are sprinkled throughout the opera, such as the stirring *Sinner Man* and *Hallelujah to the Lamb*. Zenobia's daughter, soprano Janis Peri, who sang in the amateur, shoe-string production in 1985, attended the Townsend Opera production and called it her mother's dream come true.

Jeannie Gayle Pool, a Los Angeles composer, historian and musicologist, met Ms. Perry in 1979 and became her biographer and publisher, and maintains a web site about her: zenobiapowellperry.org. From a large box of penciled manuscript, Dr. Pool in the last year, rewrote and streamlined the libretto, created 300 pages of piano-vocal score, orchestrated the entire two-hour work, and prepared 360 pages of score and 1400 pages of instrumental parts for performance, a loving but astounding task! It is rare to find such a variety of requisite musical skills in one person.

Bringing a new opera into the repertoire for the first time is a challenging and noble venture for any opera company. The General and Artistic Director, Matthew Buckman, writes that the Townsend Opera is particularly proud to introduce an opera with such powerful cultural and historical themes that look beyond well-established racial and cultural divides. He says, “If people did it 150 years ago at Tawawa House to secure the freedom of their fellow man, then people all over the world can do it to solve the challenges we face today.”

Forfest – A Second Impression - for Composer USA

by Laurence Sherr

In June 2014, I arrived for the second time in Kroměříž, a Moravian town in the eastern Czech Republic, for the arts festival known as Forfest. It is the 25th anniversary of this annual festival organized by Vaclav and Zdenka Vaculovič. My article about the festival and colloquium last year included background about the history, architecture, art, and performance spaces here, and since it is available online (<http://www.forfest.cz/?id=1&action=seznam&presenter=Review>), this article will focus on selected performances and exhibitions that I attended this year.

All but two Forfest events this season were concentrated into 12 consecutive days in late June and early July in Kroměříž and the regional city of Olomouc. The concerts that were not part of this cluster were also separated geographically; the first took place in mid-June in Prague, and the last will occur in September in Bratislava. That first concert featured the Austrian Duo Polyzoides, a brother-sister violin and piano grouping whose familial affinity extended to tight ensemble playing even in extremely challenging passages from contemporary literature. The programming of mostly 20th century works included an adventurous solo violin work by the Czech conductor and composer Karel Reiner, one of the few composers who survived Nazi imprisonment in Terezín, the ghetto/camp near Prague that served as a propaganda vehicle during the Holocaust. Even more complex were *Lieder Ohne Worte* of Heinz Holliger, which the Duo handled with aplomb. Two living Czech composers, Vojtěch Mojžíš and Jan Grossman, were in attendance for the performance of their works, and, as the concert took place in the Smetana Museum on the banks of the Vltava (Moldau) River, a work by that paragon of Czech musical culture rounded out the program. Full program listings for all 2014 Forfest events can be seen at the festival website: http://www.forfest.cz/data/doc/programy/forfest_2014.pdf.

The opening concert in Kroměříž featured the violin-piano duo of Pavel Burdych and Zuzana Berešová performing in the gilded Assembly Hall of Chateau Kroměříž, one of the main concert venues of the festival. The highly reverberant acoustics of this cavernous Rococo hall can work to advantage for quiet and delicate passage, but to disadvantage for thick, loud textures and fast passages. Burdych and Berešová adjusted their performances to these acoustics for their varied program of works by 20th and 21st century composers that included two world premieres and one Czech premiere, the latter being my *Four Short Pieces* for solo violin.

There were three events the following day, including a vocal and organ concert in the Church of St. Maurice, and an Assembly Hall performance by Ensemble Damian from Olomouc. Ensemble Damian gave an uninterrupted concert, a continuous performance of the compositional work of its apparent leader Vít Zouhar. Zouhar performed mainly on a very small keyboard, as did the other players in various segments of the work. These keyboards were sounded by air blown by the player through a mouthpiece and tube. All the players sang in certain sections, so that sections of homogeneous timbres alternated with heterogeneous ones. The instruments in the ensemble included viola, trombone, and percussion, and the audience was treated to effective spatial modulation when the players sang/played while moving through the space and around the audience. The composition seemed to have sections with precise relationships of pitches and rhythms, and others where the players improvised within rhythmic or melodic structures suggested by the composer. Repeated and evolving musical cells were representative of a tonal, minimalist style, but with a particular Czech twist.

Over the next few days openings of art exhibitions alternated with concert events. On a pleasant Sunday afternoon, guests gathered at the Rotunda of the Flower Garden for a display of the large-scale triptychs of Vaclav Vaculovič along with the glass sculptures of Marek Trizuljak. The covered space under the Baroque dome provides shelter in the middle of the large formal gardens, and space for about a dozen of Vaculovič's three-paneled paintings in rooms radiating out from the central space. Descriptions of the works by the artist revealed his concern with the human psyche, spirituality in music and art, and monumental themes. Soprano Stella Maris, who sang superbly in the Church of St. Maurice organ concert the evening before, joined violinist Zdenka Vaculovičová for several short works to kick off the event. On a smaller scale, and appropriate to the intimate display space at the Gallery Artuš Kroměříž, were two types of work by Czech artist Hana Stehlíková Babyrádová—etchings and ceramic containers filled with plant life.

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