

# Bronx Arts Ensemble premiers work by local Riverdalian composer

By PAULETTE SCHNEIDER

The Chopin was tender and tempestuous, the Mozart was fresh and spontaneous, the Strauss was bold and lyrical, the world premier by Oliver Caplan—a Riverdale boy—was dreamy and delightful, and the stately home of Peter Joseph and Elizabeth Scheuer was a perfect setting for last Sunday's chamber music series concert by Bronx Arts Ensemble performers.

World-class flutist Maria Piccinini called the program “unabashedly romantic”—each of the composers was “in some way touched by romance” when composing the works performed.

Caplan, a recognized composer, has written orchestral, choral, solo instrumental and vocal, band, and chamber works, including some commissioned by the BAE and by other groups.

The romance in “My Elephant Cloud,” a 2011 piece for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano, is Caplan’s infatuation with nature. A Massachusetts resident since his days at the Boston Conservatory, Caplan is enchanted with the “incredible access to beautiful outdoors areas” that Boston has to offer.

“In the summer, getting outside is one of the purest joys. My friends and I love to go swimming in Walden Pond, hiking in the White Mountains, to the beach on Cape Cod—all of that kind of stuff,” he said in an introduction to the piece. “During the summer and during a hot New England fall, I remember coming home and sketching these melodies. That’s where it comes from.”

Caplan called the Bronx Arts Ensemble an important presence in the Bronx community. “I think they deserve a round of

applause,” he said.

William Scribner, BAE’s founder and artistic director, thought of starting a professional ensemble in 1972, when he lived on Fieldston Road. He’d been playing bassoon in ensembles throughout the metropolitan area, but never in his own borough, he said.

He approached a member of the New York State Council on the Arts, a fellow member of the American Symphony Orchestra. What does one have to do, he asked, to start a professional ensemble in The Bronx?

Scribner was told that any seed money for such a venture was contingent upon gathering both a quality ensemble and a significant audience and that when he could demonstrate “potential worthy of funding,” the council would “entertain a grant.”

He started by staging ten local concerts in a variety of genres. “I went from a string quartet to a jazz quartet to a chorus to an all-Bach concert,” he recalled. At one Friday night Hostos Community College event, 1,200 people came for a performance of zarzuela, a Spanish opera-like form.

Having met both funding requirements—great performers and appreciative crowds—Scribner won the grant that launched the organization.

BAE’s season now includes holiday specials and series concerts of chamber music, jazz and “Just for Kids” selections. Last year’s Memorial Day concert at Van Cortlandt Park, featuring a work by Caplan, attracted an audience of 4,000.

They collaborate with local colleges and work in 50 different public schools.

“The key is the principal,” Scribner said. “We’re in an era right now where we haven’t had arts in the public schools for 25 years because they wanted to save money. But now, the Philharmonic and the Met are asking, ‘Where are our audiences? They’re not trained.’ They don’t know where the audiences are because they’ve disappeared.”

BAE’s Young Bronx Artist competi-

tion is open to youngsters who live in the borough or attend Bronx schools. At Sunday’s concert, pianist Mizuho Yoshimune, a Bronx Science Yale-bound senior, took total command of the keyboard as she opened the program with Chopin’s Scherzo No. 2.

To view the season’s concert offerings and purchase tickets, visit [bronxartsensemble.org](http://bronxartsensemble.org).



Bronx Arts Ensemble virtuosos following last Sunday’s performance at the home of Peter Joseph and Elizabeth Scheuer. From left: violist Sally Shumway, pianist Rolando Rolim, flutist Marina Piccinini, composer Oliver Caplan, violinist Jorge Avila, cellist Bruce Wang, and clarinetist Mitchell Kriegler.