

THE VOICE MAGAZINE

Volume 18 Issue 19
May 14, 2010

Le Zazz Band

La musique de fusion

Skype Me

Joining in

Dr. Cindy Ives

Around eCampus



*Plus: From Where I Sit, Sister Aurora,
The Mindful Bard, and much more ...*

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We love to hear from you! Send your questions and comments to voice@voicemagazine.org, and please indicate if we may publish your letter.



Re: "In Conversation With: Dinuk Wijeratne, Part II" by Wanda Waterman St. Louis, v18 i18 (2010-05-07)

This young man displays a wisdom beyond his years. His interaction with music occurs at a level few can understand, but fortunately, many can appreciate and enjoy. His directorial style demands excellence from those he conducts, while he has the ability as a teacher to draw out the best in those under his tutelage, enabling them to—eventually—satisfy his demanding standards.

These skills have found a home with the Nova Scotia Youth Orchestra, just as the serenity of this place, and "the personal qualities of the people here—warmth, an easygoing nature . . ." have allowed this gifted musician to feel so much at home in Atlantic Canada.

David Richey

SKYPE ME

Christine Purfield



I'm beginning to feel like I'm a joiner—not the woodworking type joiner, but the type who joins groups for the sake of joining groups. I joined the Facebook community because my cousin said it was time I joined the 21st century. I was unaware at the time that you could join a century; I thought you were just in it, but obviously I was wrong. Then I joined the Windows 7 herd because Vista gave me a headache and taught my dog totally inappropriate language for a two-year-old. Now I've joined the Skype community.

Skype, for those of you who are almost as ignorant of these things as I am, is a VoIP (voice over Internet protocol) that allows you to phone a long-lost childhood friend three thousand miles away and see her via a video connection in her curlers and dressing gown at any time of the day or night for free.

I don't have any long-lost childhood friends; the friends I had as a child are lost for a reason: they were part of the decision to emigrate, and I have no intention of finding them. So I

Skyped my brother in England.

My brother has two teenage children and is heavily into Internet marketing with his own business, so he's up on these things. He courteously agreed to accept my call and I was able to see him in all his early Sunday evening glory, lounging on the couch, arms crossed over a recently acquired pot-belly, eyes red from the excesses of the night before, and looking for all the world like our dear departed father.

Our father would have found Skype an interesting experience. He bought three little video cameras for the computer when they first became popular back in the mid 1990s. There was no VoIP back then, but that didn't stop our 70-something-year-old father from encouraging my brother and me to make little video clips of ourselves and attach them to an email. It was fun for a while, but I soon got bored of having to make sure I wasn't having a bad hair day before "talking" to my Dad.

During my Skype video conversation with my brother and his herd, I was able to fully appreciate my 17-year-old nephew yawning while not covering his mouth, my brother rolling his eyes while I was talking, and my 12-year-old niece applying blue eye shadow. This last fact in itself was distressing as one of the first fashion laws I learnt at the Wirral County Grammar School for Girls was that under no circumstances was one to wear blue eye shadow, even if your eyes or garments were blue. Miss Winifred Ashton, she who also taught us that the ugliest part of a woman's body is the back of her knees, would have been horrified and is surely now turning in her grave.

But back to Skype. It's easy to join (it has to be or I wouldn't have been bothered). A two-minute software download, some sort of microphone capability, and the optional video webcam, and you're all set. Call all your friends for free. Especially if you're a pensioner.

Why does it make a difference if you're a pensioner, I hear you query? Well, did you know that the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board (CCPIB) paid \$300 million for a stake in Skype Technologies back in late 2009? Who knew that our government-run pension plan was so cool?

Given that CPP recipients have a vested interest in the investments of the fund, it behooves them to make sure the venture is successful. Not that this will be difficult: Skype was valued at US\$2.75 billion in November 2009 with the potential for huge positive returns. Just like futures and derivatives used to have.

They may actually be on to a good thing. Last time I logged on to Skype, there were 21,434,149 people worldwide also actively using the system. Now that's a lot of people.

Apparently you can Skype anybody—whether you know them not. So, if you're wondering what to do with all the spare time now that you're fed up with the inane comments people put on their Facebook pages, you can just type a name into a box, press search, pick someone and call them. For free.

Just remember two things: get dressed before you call so that you stay onside with the indecency laws, and cover your mouth when you yawn.

Oh, and don't use Skype to call for help from the fire or police departments. With 21,434,149 residences to check out worldwide, they'll never find you in time.



AU's People and Places

Dr. Cindy Ives

Dr. Cindy Ives is the Director of AU's Centre for Learning Design and Development (CLDD). In this position, she leads "multifunctional teams responsible for the design, development, production and evaluation of distance education courses and programs at AU."

Dr. Ives has been with AU since July 2007, but says that she has "worked in higher education for many years in a variety of contexts and locations," and has been "an instructor,

faculty developer, researcher, distance educator, academic administrator, and evaluation consultant."

"I have both professional and teaching experience in university administration and distance education, with expertise in designing and developing effective course materials and faculty development. My doctoral studies in Educational Technology at Concordia University and subsequent responsibilities at McGill University (both in Montreal) focused on ensuring the appropriate integration of technologies for teaching and learning through collaborative, multi-perspective and systemic planning, implementation and evaluation processes," she says. "Before that, I worked in Advancement, Continuing Education and Distance Education at Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario."

As Director of AU's CLDD, Dr. Ives is responsible for "articulating and disseminating a clear vision and strategy for course development procedures, processes, and tracking within the scope of AU's Strategic and

IT plans. This includes contributing to the selection, implementation, and evaluation of new pedagogical approaches and methodologies designed to improve the distance and online learning opportunities for AU students."

"I collaborate with Academic Centres and Student Service areas; liaise with partner institutions; manage a staff of 45 and the resources to support their work; and recommend resources to enhance the quality and availability of courses and programs," she says. "As well, I have recently taken on a new initiative in designing and delivering educational development activities for AU faculty and staff, and I am the Program Director for the Community Adjustment Fund (CAF) content digitization projects. This project has added another 50 staff to CLDD."

Dr. Ives lives and works in Athabasca. "Most days, you can find me in my office on the second floor, at my computer or on the telephone or Skype. Meetings occupy the majority of my time, with at least 10 monthly meetings, five weekly meetings, and four bi-weekly meetings as part of my regular schedule. CLDD has one third of its staff based in Edmonton now, and I travel back and forth most weeks."

"A typical day will involve a planning meeting, some troubleshooting, data analysis about productivity or problem solving, and a lot of communication with the stakeholders in various projects: members of the university executive, managers within CLDD and in our collaborating departments, faculty members working on course developments, course design and development teams and production units. When I'm lucky," she says, "I have the opportunity to teach somebody something about using technology to enhance learning or productivity. I also write lots of reports, proposals, and presentations."

"One of Athabasca University's strategic goals is to use learning technologies to enhance student learning and success," explains Dr. Ives. "My Centre is right at the heart of the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of that goal, through its mandate for the development of quality courses and learning resources. We have a team of staff who are uniquely qualified to design quality learning materials and environments for student success."

DID YOU KNOW?



Get Social with AU's Centre for Nursing and Health Studies

If you can't get enough of your favourite Nursing and Health Studies topics by studying, now you can connect with others and keep the conversation going on Facebook and Twitter.

The [Centre for Nursing and Health Studies \(CNHS\)](#) homepage has links so you can sign up, stay connected, and keep up to date on all the latest news.

The [Centre for Psychology](#) is on Facebook and Twitter as well, and there's also a general Facebook group for AU students, where you can search for people you know and take part in discussions.

So if you're a fan of social networking, why not join the CNHS conversation online?



Le Zazz Band

Le Zazz Band est un groupe musical de Casablanca (Maroc). Ses huit membres l'enrichissent tous de leur connaissance subtile et leur sens exceptionnel de la musique. Leur son mêle avec énergie gnawa, rock, jazz, funk, reggae et d'autres influences.

Récemment, Idriss Eloudghiri, leader du groupe, a pris le temps de parler de sa musique avec Wanda Waterman St. Louis.

Le Zazz Band: La musique de fusion est vivante à Casablanca

« La zazz-attitude consiste à faire renaître l'espoir, avoir confiance en soi et en toutes les personnes qui vous soutiennent, vous

encouragent, vous aiment et vous applaudissent. Devant les difficultés, on ne doit pas reculer et rester les bras croisés. » Idriss Eloudghiri

Fond musical

J'ai grandi à Casablanca et [passé] 6 ans en Ukraine—études supérieures pharmaceutiques. J'ai eu une enfance normale. J'étais gâté: je suis le plus petit de mes frères.

Je suis autodidacte, avec plusieurs expériences musicales qui ont enrichi mon répertoire; et surtout j'ai une très bonne oreille musicale. En 1995, j'ai créé le groupe Angles (a rock band).

En 1999, j'ai immigré en Ukraine, création du groupe « Sunstone » (alternative rock), et enregistré mon premier album. En 2002, création du groupe « Explained », plus mature (bossa, jazz): 1 album, *Bossa in love*. En 2005, retour au Maroc et création du groupe Zazz Band en 2006 (fusion, world music)/ 1 album, *Ana Larbi* (Moi, l'Arabe).



La vie créatrice

Beaucoup de choses sont nécessaires pour que je puisse faire preuve de créativité, surtout l'aide de l'entourage et du système du bled¹ qui se réveille petit à petit.

Le fait d'être attiré par le domaine musical artistique ne fait qu'améliorer les compétences en général, surtout la sensibilité vis à vis de l'entourage, proche et loin. Je suis devenu plus ouvert, créatif et sensible, et je cherche toujours le partage.

[Pour me] ressourcer après le travail, je [fais de la] relaxation—surtout la nature, la musique bien sûr, et ma femme, que j'adore, ma source d'inspiration.

Pour la composition, j'écris ce que je ressens et ce que j'ai vécu; je n'écris jamais de l'imaginaire et surtout sur le quotidien marocain.

La religion fait partie de moi. Côté politique, je ne suis pas trop engagé mais je donne mon point de vue. En 2 ou 3 titres que vous pouvez dire religieux, car on parle de la générosité de Dieu; le côté politique, ça influence, bien sûr, mais on s'est habitué à ça.

On répète trois fois par semaine et c'est très sérieux; on fait des recherches musicales, surtout sur le patrimoine folklorique marocain, tout en le modernisant pour le faire plus connaître au monde.

J'écoute plein de styles; mais en ce moment je fais des recherches sur la musique turque et des Balkans, car il y a une certaine ressemblance avec certain type de folklore marocain.

Comment avez-vous trouvé votre nom?

Le jour où on cherchait à donner un nom à notre groupe, un copain nous a vus, nous a écoutés. On s'était bien présentés et c'est là où il a prononcé: « Vous êtes zazz (le mot zazz, en dialecte marocain, ça veut dire chic, beau, bien entretenu). Et voilà—le « band des zazzous » (Zazz Band).

*Moi le soldat oublier
Quand je remporte la guerre
J'entend les gents chanté
Quand je la paire je trouve personne a coté*

*Chargé le fusie tirés sur l'ennemie
Car ils mon dit cé plut un amis*

*Moi le soldat
Je me sen si perdue entre leur désir
Sa me fait plut plaisir
Suivre leur ordre cé un désordre
Paix sur vous je serais plut au rendez-vous*

"Me the Soldier," composé par Idriss Eloudghiri



¹ Bled: désigne la campagne en Afrique du Nord.

VOICE JOB POSTING

Managing Editor, The Voice Magazine

The Voice Magazine is seeking a new Managing Editor to handle all the day-to-day duties of publishing *The Voice Magazine* each week. We publish 49 issues per year each Friday. Hours are flexible, but you must be able to devote 25-30 hours per week to the job. The Editor will work from home and must have a good quality computer and high-speed Internet. Some software will be supplied.

Skills Required

- Superior writing skills and flawless copy-editing
- Very strong Internet research skills
- Strong email skills (sorting, using attachments, blind copying, etc.)
- Familiarity with HTML an asset
- Experienced with Adobe Acrobat PDF maker, PhotoShop, and Microsoft Office
- Knowledge of copyright and privacy legislation an asset
- Graphic and photo editing for the web
- Knowledge of proper citation guidelines and fair use requirements
- Must be very detail oriented



Duties

The Managing Editor will:

- Copy-edit all submissions
- Format and complete the PDF edition of *The Voice* each week
- Upload all articles and graphics to *The Voice* website each week
- Respond to email inquiries to *The Voice*
- Format and create graphics for articles
- Write copy as needed
- Develop new column ideas
- Check articles for proper citations
- Perform other duties as assigned

The successful applicant must live in Canada and will be in close contact with the Editor-in-Chief by email and phone. If you are interested in this position, please email Tamra at executivedirector@ausu.org with a cover letter, resume, and sample of your writing. Applicants will be asked to complete a copy-editing and writing skills test. Remuneration will be 20 - 25k per annum, depending on experience. *The Voice* is an equal opportunities employer.

Resumes will be accepted up to and including May 28, 2010.

Sister Aurora

There's a rainbow dancing in the sky tonight, and I think I'm gonna go outside . . .

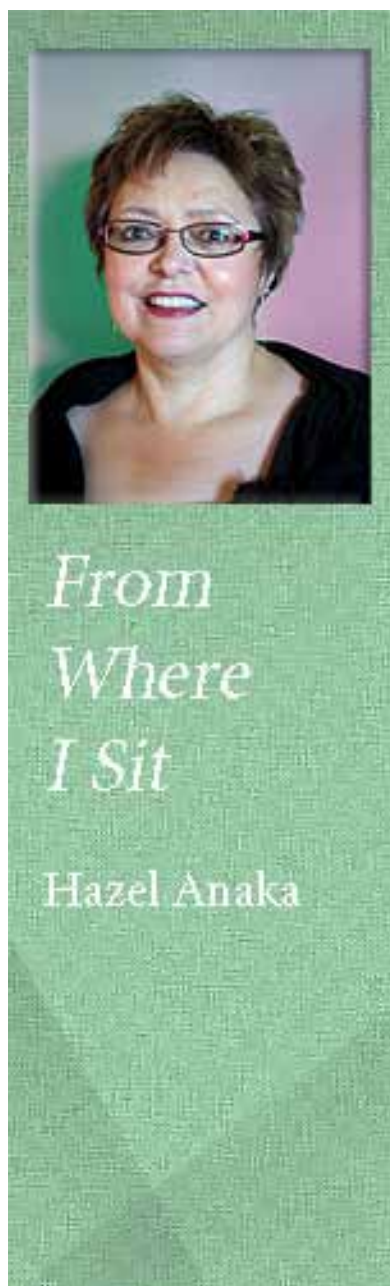
#40

How
do
you
get
out?
Simple.
You
kill
them.

Kill WHO?!

The phone screamers.
The arm twisters.
The fist-happy
drunks.

And we start
with Shane.



Party On!

When you reach a certain age, it seems that the losses and heartache outweigh the joys and celebrations. For example, there seem to be more funerals than weddings, more sickness and disease than births. And while a lot of people bemoan that reality, not many take action.

Not us. This past Saturday night, about 50 people gathered in a small, old country hall to celebrate Roy's sixtieth birthday. The initial idea arose in March over an intimate dinner at Greg and Carrie's. Roy protested and pooh-poohed the idea. The kids and I ganged up on him. He remained steadfast in his opposition. I said, "Okay, to hell with you" and changed the subject. Not three minutes later, he was asking where would the party be, who would be invited, and so on. Do I know how to work the guy or what?

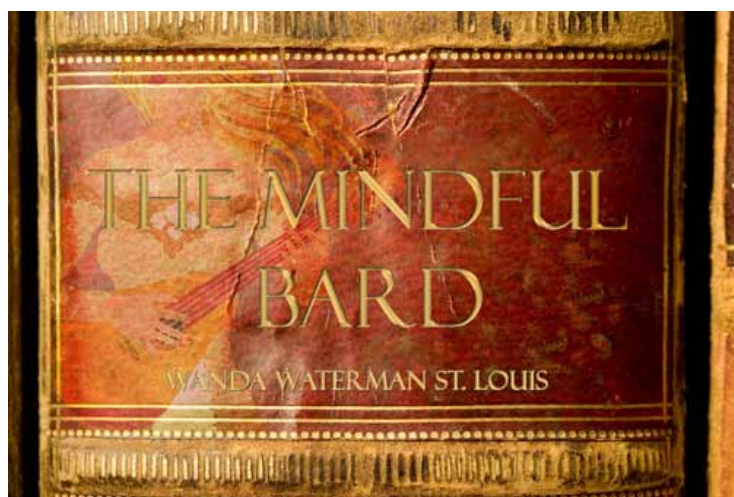
By all accounts, the party was a success. It was also very tiring to execute, nerve-racking to organize, and expensive to host. Aside from the traditional Ukrainian dishes (pereshke, nachinka, lazy holoptsi), there was roast beef, sweet-and-sour pork, scalloped potatoes, salads, and pickles. The meal was a hit.

The other big treat, especially for the men, was the fact I convinced Roy to pull out his 1970 Dodge Super Bee and drive it to the party site. He had ordered the four-on-the-floor, Hemi orange (with white leather interior and black vinyl roof) muscle car from the factory. It was our date car a hundred years ago and has been parked for the past few decades. Thank God it started because cars, like people, that just sit around unused tend to dry up. Totally precious is a photo of nine-month-old Grady standing on the seat gripping the wheel and honking the horn.

The role of host and hostess is a tiring one. Everyone there had a connection to us but no one had a connection to everyone else. So our role was to keep mingling. I felt like a bee flitting from flower to flower. None of the conversations were complete or satisfying in themselves because others needed attention too. At one point, I whined to my aunt and a cousin that I wished we had done a better job of getting people to mix. "We didn't come here to make friends; we came to visit with people we know," was the sharp retort.

Hilary and I did a fine job of decorating the place. Our jumping-off point was the rolls of black and yellow caution tape warning of a party in progress that we stapled across the bar and some doorways. Black tablecloths, yellow and green bowls of colour-coordinated munchies, lime green votive holders, a fresh flower arrangement, candles, and an iPod playlist of some favourite tunes created a party ambience. We even risked torching the old hall when we lit the 60 candles on Roy's cake! A total surprise was the gift of a trip to Las Vegas from the kids.

By way of recap, we noticed people eat and drink less, and leave earlier, but still appreciate the chance to get together for some fun. Better a birthday party than a funeral, from where I sit.



Books, Music, and Film to Wake Up Your Muse and Help You Change the World

Christos Hatzis: A Mystical Treasure Trove at the Vanguard of Contemporary Music, Part II

Hatzis's music [online](#)

(Recently, Canadian composer Christos Hatzis took the time to talk with Wanda Waterman St. Louis about music, social inequality, and spiritual healing. See Part I of this article [here](#).)

"Unfortunately the media has capitalized on this unhealthy relationship between classical music

and the elite. The only time you hear classical music on TV is for BMW commercials or some sort of pretentious upper-class social event. This is a deliberate falsification of classical music's true colours."

Christos Hatzis

Composition Method

I do my best work when I sufficiently submerge my consciousness in the process of composing to the point where I no longer consciously know what I'm doing. So the creative process is a mystery to me. I can write afterwards and explain why things happen in my music the way they do, but this is like investigating my composing process after the fact. In the actual moment of creation I am blissfully lost and have no conscious understanding of what I'm doing.

Spiritual Journey, Creative Journey

The two are inextricably connected. Of late I'm not even sure if I can compose anything on a subject not connected with the spiritual dimension. That's not to say that I'm limiting my range, but I have to find the connection between the subject I am dealing with and its spiritual dimension.

I will be soon embarking on the composition of an opera, with a libretto by Margaret Atwood based on the last days of Pauline Johnson, a turn-of-the-century Canadian poet and stage personality who died of cancer in 1913. Her last days, when she re-examined her life under the influence of morphine, is the time covered by the opera. I'm hoping that through the music I will be able to find this connection between Pauline's state of mind at the very end of her life and the spiritual dimension, even though the latter may not be overtly explored in the libretto. The beauty with music is that you can faithfully serve a text and still convey your own messages alongside with it.



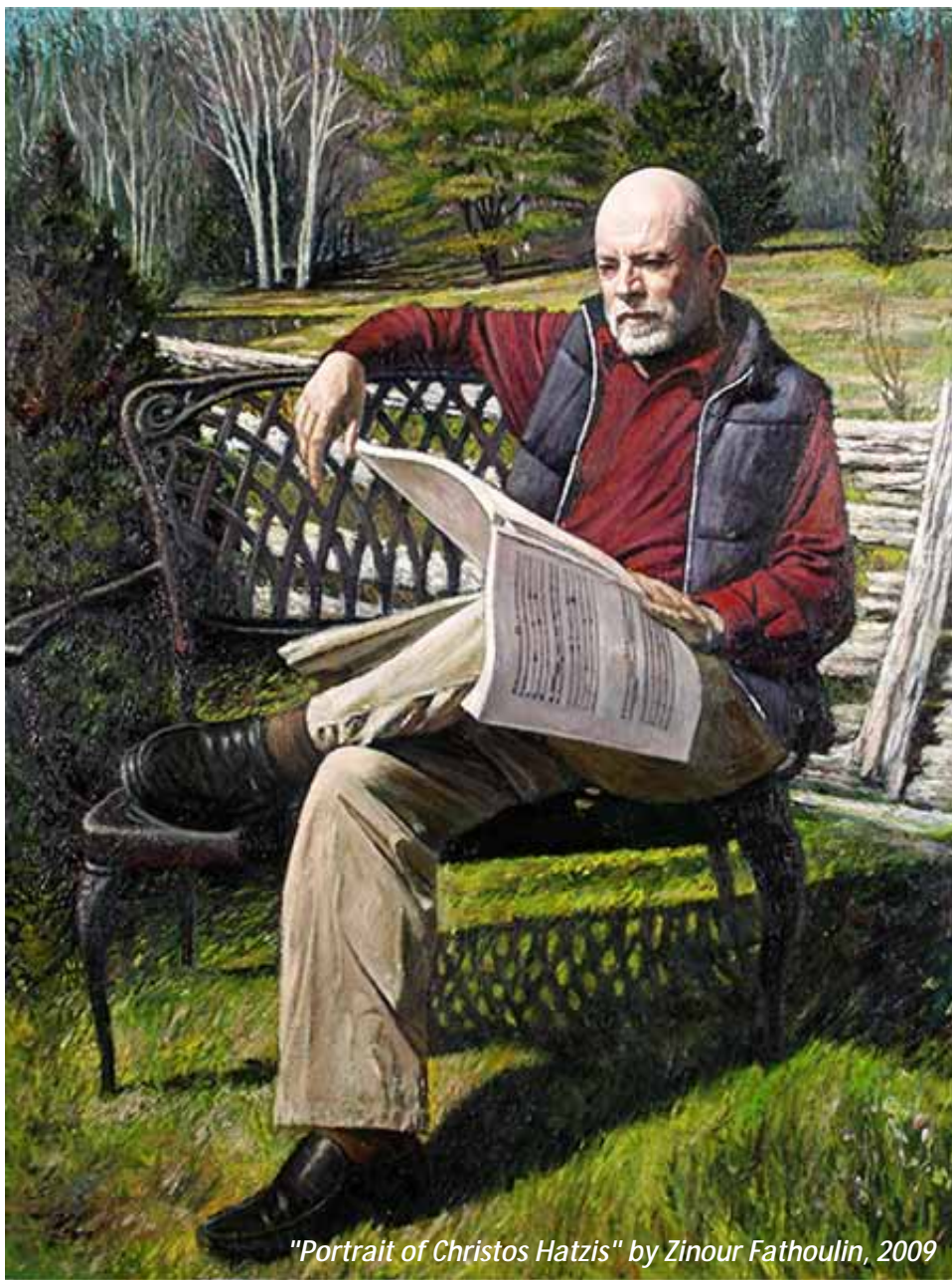
Social Conscience

I fell in love with classical music early in life, but I was growing up in a working class environment where classical music was viewed as the music of the socially and economically privileged, and I did not belong to that class. Before I was born, my father was politically exiled by the right-wing government in Greece and held for years in a concentration camp, not for anything he did but for what he believed in.

So I grew up being politically sensitive and with an unusual ability to deconstruct social situations and conventions to their very core. I always thought that the peculiar symbiosis between classical music and the social elite was rather unhealthy and one that would eventually prove to be detrimental to classical music. Classical music, with its structure and complexity, should, I thought, be an agent of social transformation and not a confirmation of the status quo.

Classical Music and Classism

Unfortunately the media has capitalized on this unhealthy relationship between classical music and the elite. The only time you hear classical music on TV is for BMW commercials or some sort of pretentious upper-class social event. This is a deliberate falsification of classical music's true colours.



"Portrait of Christos Hatzis" by Zinour Fathoulin, 2009

Beethoven made music about social mobility at a time when the aristocracy was embracing the status quo. Mozart's music is about meritocracy (as that was expressed by his Masonic brotherhood, a radical movement in his time), not inherited aristocracy. While the great music of the past was always dependent on the centres of power for patronage, its message was more radical than even the creators themselves would care to publicly admit. To love and to be your "brother's keeper" have always been and will always be radical political concepts. No status quo will do more than pay lip service to them.

I am increasingly attracted to music organizations that embrace social transformation as their central mandate. Like CityMusic Cleveland, an amazing young symphony orchestra that gives free concerts (which often include a free meal and babysitting) in downtrodden communities in the Cleveland area. I worked with them last year in Cleveland and next November they will join me and Greek pop superstar George Dalaras in a concert of my music at Avery Fisher Hall in New York's Lincoln Center.

I am also trying to develop some initiatives that will create opportunities for our graduate composition students at the University of Toronto where I teach full-time, to engage with various inner-city communities that know next to nothing about classical music. I believe that if classical music is to survive and play a transformative role in society it must shed its elitist association rather quickly.

Creatively, my music has been trying to embrace the geographical and chronological Other and point towards a non-Westerncentric view of the world. This is widespread now but it wasn't so in the early '80s when I first began to compose music that proposed such solutions to the problem of structure and identity. Things are slowly changing in contemporary music but not as quickly as the circumstances require. As geopolitical pressures increase there is always a danger of social eruption due to such pressures (already being experienced in Europe and south of our border). Music and spirituality must play a role quickly to heal deep social fissures that will be much harder to close once opened.

The Bard could use some help scouting out new material. If you discover any books, compact disks, or movies which came out in the last twelve months and which you think fit the Bard's criteria, please drop a line to bard@voicemagazine.org. If I agree with your recommendation, I'll thank you online.

CLICK OF THE WRIST – Lady Luck

Sometimes, the laws of physics seem to take a day off. Either that or Lady Luck is working overtime. Whichever way you look at it, all these people were having very lucky days—or claimed to be.

Trainspotter

Trainspotters were glued to the sight of the steam locomotive *Oliver Cromwell* chugging into Thurston Station recently. In fact, one man was so engrossed that he didn't notice the high-speed commuter train bearing down on him from the opposite direction—and that just missed him by inches.

Scary Aircraft Landings

It's nerve wracking enough to watch these landings from outside the plane. We don't even want to know what it must have been like for the passengers.

Life is Beautiful

A Turkish man, Cem Tokac, was standing beside a flatbed truck as it crossed a set of train tracks. What he didn't see coming was the train that ploughed into the truck from the other side. "Life is really beautiful," Mr. Tokac observed after surviving with only minor injuries.

Lotto Luck

When self-employed photographer Phillip Brunelle won \$1,000 on a scratch card, he was having a good day. And it got even better when he won \$1 million on a second ticket! But it seems his luck may have run out when his "win" started drawing attention to his past.

AUSU UPDATE



AUSU Executive Election

AUSU has recently held its internal election for the Executive. We wish to congratulate Barbara Rielly (President), Bethany Tynes (Vice President External and Student Affairs) and Sarah Kertcher (Vice President Finance and Administration) on their election and thank those that ran for their willingness to serve.

Internal elections are being held to determine committee membership and we expect that all will be in place shortly. Our new Council is taking its bearings and has already begun to set the direction for this term.

Student Issues

AUSU recently completed a compilation of reported student issues covering a two year period; all issues were recorded in such a way as to ensure that student information remains protected and private. This effort confirmed what we long suspected; that tutor problems were the single biggest issue faced by our students (56 of 120 complaints).

Outdated course materials and errors in texts continue to be reported as well as were exam issues, slowness of the transfer process, and the scantiness of information in School of Business FAQs. Over that two year period there was a decrease in the number of complaints about student financing, exam request problems, difficulty registering in more than six courses, and materials shortages for courses. Kudos to AU for improving in those areas. Now if we could only get the Tutors' Union to the table . . .

New 2010 AUSU Handbook/Planners – Arrived!

Finally! People have already started receiving the new planners in the mail, and we're currently shipping them out as fast as the orders come in. Full of useful information about AUSU, writing styles, course grading, great finds online for your studies that you may not have known about, as well as having places to write down your phone numbers, keep track of your assignments, and, oh yeah, a year's worth of calendar to plan out your schedule too. We'll give one free to each AUSU member just for the asking.

Remember, though, we only print a limited number of these each year, so when they're gone, they're gone.

Let 'em Know who Represents for You!

AUSU logo mugs, hoodies, USB keys, and much more are all available for sale from our office. Also, used locks can be purchased at half price! Check out our merchandise catalog on our front page. You should check out our hoodies in particular—made in Canada and 100% bamboo, we're offering them for just barely over our cost, and they're both durable and comfortable.

And if you have new little ones in your family, or know somebody who does, check out our baby onesies. Made by American Apparel, these onesies are high quality and let folks know your kids are growing up to great things as a "Future Graduate of Athabasca U"

AUSU Scheduling Meeting with Tutors' Union – Not really an Update

Some things resist change. We're still waiting for a response from the Tutor's Union as to when we might be able to meet with them to discuss ways that AUSU and the Tutor's Union can work together to ensure that students are getting the contact they need. Unfortunately, they haven't yet replied, so we're stepping up our campaign to get in touch with them. If you want to help, the next time you're talking to your tutor, ask them if they know when the Tutor's Union will meet with AUSU so that the groups can work together on common issues.

Our statistics we've been collecting from the forums and your calls show that issues with tutors - specifically the amount of time taken for marking assignments and exams are your number one concern. Help us help you.

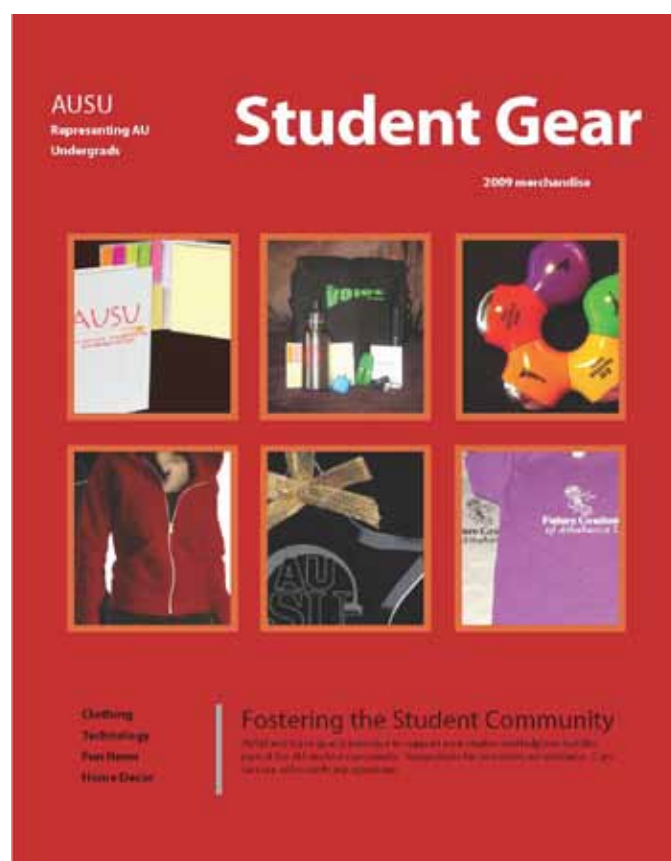
SmartDraw Program Renewal

Some of you who took advantage of our program to provide SmartDraw software to members have been getting notifications that your software license will soon be expiring. Fortunately, AUSU will be continuing this program, so if you haven't already, go to the AUSU home page to download the newest version.

SmartDraw allows you to create a wide range of graphics for your assignments and submit them electronically in a Word file. You can also place your graphics in Excel or PowerPoint files, or export them as TIF, GIF, or JPEG files to make a web graphic or even a logo. Just a few of the graphics you can make include Venn diagrams, genetics charts, graphs, organizational and flow charts, and Gantt charts.

For any course that requires charts that cannot be easily created in Word or Excel, this should be a real time saver and make it easier to submit all portions of an assignment by email.

Remember, though, that you should always check with your tutor to find out if there is a specific format he or she prefers. Your tutor does not have to have SmartDraw to view these graphics, however. Installations under this program are good for one year. The package includes both the Standard and Health Care editions of SmartDraw.



INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: Manitoba welfare system may switch to debit cards

For many welfare recipients, the fees charged by cheque-cashing companies are just one more obstacle to making ends meet. But the Manitoba government is looking at a switch to debit cards, a move that would “get around the stigma, fees and hurdles that can come with cashing monthly cheques.”

As the *Globe and Mail* reports, the debit card would be linked to a bank account where welfare benefits are deposited each month. Recipients would then swipe their cards at retailers, and cards “would be automatically reloaded every month.”

The government prefers using direct deposit for payments, partly to eliminate the administrative costs of replacing lost or damaged cheques, but “less than two-thirds of recipients” have signed on. One barrier is the lack of banking services, according to some poverty-rights groups.

Wayne Helgason, head of the Winnipeg Social Planning Council, told reporters that “the banks have more or less abandoned much of the inner city . . .” And without reasonable access to banks, welfare recipients are often forced to pay exorbitant fees to cheque-cashing and money-lending operations. The government’s plan faces some major hurdles, including privacy concerns and finding a provider that can manage debit-card transactions. But Dave Fisher, acting executive director of the province’s employment and income assistance program, told reporters that the goal remains “to find efficient ways to get the benefits into people’s hands, and we’re always open to ideas to improve that methodology.”

In Foreign News: Vehicle computer systems at risk to hackers

It’s bad enough that you have to protect yourself from hackers on your home computer and smart phone. But what about when they take control of the computer systems in your car—while you’re driving it? As *The New York Times* reports, two teams of scientists are warning about that very real possibility as cars become “increasingly connected to the Internet in the near future.” The scientists will be presenting a report on the topic next week. The report includes the disturbing news that researchers were able to “demonstrate the ability to adversarially control a wide range of automotive functions and completely ignore driver input—including disabling the brakes, selectively braking individual wheels on demand, stopping the engine, and so on.”

The scientists, computer security specialists at the University of Washington and the University of California, San Diego, noted that although safety measures are engineered into new cars’ computer systems, not much attention was being paid to the potential threat of hackers who might override those measures. Scientists also performed “composite attacks,” showing they could “insert malicious software and then erase any evidence of tampering after a crash.”

As more cars are linked to remote onboard services, the researchers say that “the experience of the PC industry, which did not have extensive security problems until computers became networked, was worth remembering.”

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THE VOICE

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