

# *Harmony*<sup>TM</sup>

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## Assessment of New Music: Involvement of Players and Audiences



To subscribe to *Harmony* or provide support to the Institute, contact:

### **Symphony Orchestra Institute**

1618 Orrington Avenue, Suite 318

Evanston, IL 60201

Tel: 847.475.5001 Fax: 847.475.2460

e-mail: [information@soi.org](mailto:information@soi.org)

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

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## Assessment of New Music: Involvement of Players and Audiences

**I**n the April 1998 issue of *Harmony*, American composer Soong Fu-Yuan shared his thoughts about “Restoring the Ecosystem of American Classical Music through Audience Empowerment.” Shortly after that issue went to press, the Institute learned of two programs which, while not identical to what Soong proposed, advanced the thought of player and audience involvement in the assessment of new music. In the October 1998 issue, we presented information about both the Masterprize International Composition Competition and the competition that the Philadelphia Orchestra planned as part of its centennial celebration in the year 2000. We are pleased to bring you an update.

### **Knight Foundation Issues Challenge Grant for New York Chamber Symphony Project**

In late 1998, Soong’s article came to the attention of the New York Chamber Symphony’s executive vice president, Omus Hirshbein, and music director Gerard Schwarz, who co-founded the orchestra 24 years ago. They engaged Soong to develop a musician-selected and audience-judged competition of new music for the orchestra.

The New York Chamber Symphony, WNYC Radio in New York, and National Public Radio (NPR) formed a partnership to broadcast various stages of the competition throughout the country.

In June 1999, the orchestra received a \$100,000 challenge grant for this project from the Knight Foundation, with the challenge to be met by June 2001. WNYC radio received a \$25,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. To date, the project has received grant commitments from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust. In a recent interview, Soong said he felt sure the challenge would be met.

From entries submitted, 10 semifinalists will be selected by musicians from the New York Chamber Symphony. Segments of the semifinalists’ music will be recorded by WNYC Radio and broadcast on NPR’s *Performance Today* program, carried by more than 200 radio stations across the country. The NPR radio-listening audience nationwide, along with the orchestra musicians, will then vote to pare the list to four finalists. Winners will be selected by the concert-hall

audience and radio listeners during a live concert currently scheduled for June 2002.

In a further twist, the identities of the composers will remain unknown until the winners are selected. Although WNYC Radio and NPR will include profiles of semifinalist and finalist composers during broadcasts, those profiles will not be associated directly with a musical work. Soong explained, "We want to challenge the audience with something of a guessing game."

Although Gerard Schwarz has resigned his position as music director of the New York Chamber Symphony, effective sometime after the next season, he has committed his intention to see this project through to completion.

## **Masterprize 2001**

Following the successful completion of a 1998 competition, Masterprize 2001 is well under way. Entries closed in November 2000 for this international composing competition which was conceived as a catalyst to bring listeners and composers together. The current competition received 1,151 scores, submitted from 62 countries. The United States led the way with 220 entries, followed closely by the United Kingdom with 198 entries.

An international panel of 12 judges, primarily conductors and composers, has recently completed selection of the 12 semifinalist pieces. Beginning in late April, these compositions will be broadcast by BBC Radio 3, BBC World Service, and other participating broadcasters. In June, five finalists will be selected. These works will be distributed as a complimentary CD with the September issue of *BBC Music Magazine*.

The overall winner of the competition will be decided on October 10, 2001, during a gala for which the London Symphony Orchestra will perform the five finalist works. Following the performance, the public vote will be combined with that of a celebrity jury. Weighting to determine the final winner will be:

- ◆ 45 percent from a worldwide public vote cast prior to the concert through *BBC Music Magazine*, the Internet, and by telephone;
- ◆ 10 percent from members of the London Symphony Orchestra;
- ◆ 5 percent from those in attendance at the gala; and
- ◆ 40 percent from the celebrity jury.

Readers wishing to keep track of this year's Masterprize International Composition Competition are invited to visit the Web site at <[www.masterprize.com](http://www.masterprize.com)> .

## **Philadelphia Finale**

We can also report that the Philadelphia Orchestra's centennial competition, which included an administrative partnership with the American Composers Forum, concluded on October 5, 2000. During the first half of the special concert,

the orchestra performed the three finalist works which had been composed by a Colombian-born American now based in Ann Arbor, Michigan, an Indiana native who teaches in New York, and a Chinese-born American college senior. These had been selected from 330 entries.

“Sinfonia” by Ann Arbor-based Kevin Beavers was selected to receive the \$10,000 cash prize by a vote of audience members and orchestra musicians taken during intermission. The composition was then performed twice more in Philadelphia and at Carnegie Hall.