



TOP ROW: Paul Wolfe (LEFT) and Sarasota violin student in a master class.
MIDDLE ROW: Students at Bowdoin.
BOTTOM: Lewis Kaplan

Fraternal twins separated at birth? The Sarasota and Bowdoin music festivals, both born in the mid-1960s, are success stories authored by chamber musicians.

LIFE BEGINS AT

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Some music festivals, such as Aspen, got started with a Big Cultural Idea. Others get going because touring performers fell in love with a beautiful place in winter and wanted an excuse to come back on a regular basis. Still others, like Kneisel Hall, were once the sites of informal summer gatherings of chamber musicians and their students. And some festivals get a jump start when opportunity knocks—and then, through the efforts of charismatic and dedicated directors, grow and grow.

Among the major successes in the last category are the Bowdoin International Music Festival and the Sarasota Music Festival. Both celebrate fortieth anniversaries this year. (In the interests of numerical accuracy, it should be said that Bowdoin is slightly senior: founded in 1964, it is a true forty-year-old. Sarasota, established in 1965, is strictly speaking only thirty-nine and now celebrating its forty seasons, not forty years.) One is held on the rocky coast of Maine, and the other near the white sands of Florida's Gulf Coast—but aside from geography, the parallels between the two festivals are striking. Both are deeply rooted in the chamber music tradition, and both operate schools that attract top students. Both artistic directors—Lewis Kaplan of Bowdoin and Paul Wolfe of Sarasota—are violinists. And, certainly key to the success of both enterprises,

both men have been there from the very beginning.

Bowdoin's founding was a case of opportunity meeting up with a ready optimism. In May 1964, Lewis Kaplan got a call from Robert K. Beckwith, then chairman of Bowdoin College's music department. The college, in Brunswick, Maine, had been hosting a summer chamber series for three years—but it was almost June, and the usual ensemble had just backed out. The college administration was all too ready to forget the idea of summer music altogether, but Beckwith just wasn't going to let the chamber music series die. Telephoning Kaplan in New York City, Beckwith asked if the Aeolian Chamber Players (the ensemble that Kaplan founded in 1962 and still plays with) would agree to stand in. "It was a Friday," recalls Kaplan, "but Bob said it couldn't wait, that I had to get up there that afternoon. So I dashed out, took the next plane to Portland, and we met with the vice president of Bowdoin the next morning." The chamber music series was saved, and (though Kaplan and Beckwith couldn't know it yet) the seeds had been sown for one of the nation's longest-lived music festivals.

Meanwhile, Paul Wolfe was living a life rich with both chamber and orchestral music. After landing a job as conductor of the Florida West Coast Symphony Orchestra in 1961, he settled in Sarasota.

A member of a string quartet made up of two professionals and two amateurs (the group later evolved into the Florida Quartet), he was also a regular at the Casals Festival in Puerto Rico. As for bringing chamber music to Sarasota, Wolfe says he wasn't thinking big at that point: "I just felt it would be nice to have some chamber music in the summertime." With the help of a generous sponsor (and with Ross Borden, humanities chairman of New College, on the presenter's side), Wolfe organized a one-week, five-concert chamber music series in the summer of 1965. Among the invited participants were oboist Robert Bloom, cellist Bernard Greenhouse, and violist Walter Trampler.



The success of those first concerts had a direct effect on the founding of the teaching component that is now central to the festival. "After the concerts, many amateur musicians approached us," says Wolfe, "and some of them asked if they could be coached." Wolfe acted immediately. In 1966—Year Number Two—the one-week concert series morphed into a two-week concert-and-coaching event. The program's reputation quickly spread by word of mouth to pre-professional music students looking for chamber music experience. Enrollment grew. Flutist Julius Baker and bassoonist Sol Schoenbach joined the faculty, and the woodwind component was born. In the third year, a three-week event was planned.

The Sarasota festival has remained at that length ever since and has long been stable at 85–90 students and 40 faculty. Wolfe likes to say, "We're not bigger, but better. We are always improving the quality." The decision to limit the size of the student body was deliberate. For a time, enrollment rose to 100 students, but Wolfe saw that this meant some of the kids weren't getting enough out of the experience.

Ever the indefatigable educator, Wolfe also ran a summer school program in which top performers gave instruction to public school music teachers. Violinist Joseph Silverstein participated in this program, which ran concurrently with the festival. Says Wolfe: "One day Joe overheard the festival orchestra rehearsing, and asked, 'Do you need another fiddle player?'" That was the beginning of Silverstein's festival participation, which extends to the present day.

Bowdoin, too, is about teaching and performing chamber music. But it has always nurtured composers of new music as well. Immediately after the first season, Kaplan and the Aeolian players started



the Gamper Contemporary Music Festival. Today, Gamper remains an integral component of the larger event, hosting six composers in residence every summer. Recent participants have included George Crumb, John Corigliano, Samuel Adler, Ralph Shapey, Luciano Berio, and Mario Davidovsky. Festival students take master classes with the composers, and each composer has one or more pieces performed by the well-known performers who make up the Bowdoin festival faculty.

With fifty-five performances in thirty-seven days, Bowdoin is best known to the public as a concert series. Nonetheless, says Executive Director Peter Simmons, 90 percent of the festival budget goes to the music school. Bowdoin's student body has grown exponentially since the early days. Twenty students came to the first teaching program thirty-nine years ago, and now a total of 250 young people are enrolled in the two three-week sessions. The focus has always been on developing the skills of a new generation of chamber music players. This summer, the Ying Quartet will coach ensembles (and do instrumental teaching) during the first session, and the Cassatt will take over that role during the second three weeks. In addition to the senior faculty, the school also hosts a corps of "performing associates"—usually graduate students who assist faculty and provide a bridge between students and seasoned professionals.

Changing times and rising competition have reshaped Bowdoin's festival in important ways. In 1997, Bowdoin college decided it no longer wanted to sponsor the festival. No longer officially affiliated with the institution, the festival keeps the name but rents the space on the 110-acre campus. And to distinguish itself from the rest of the now-



THIS PAGE

LEFT: Composer Sam Adler teaches an open master class at Bowdoin International.

RIGHT: A Sarasota student.

OPPOSITE PAGE

NEAR LEFT: Bowdoin coaching session with Ricardo Iznaola. FAR LEFT TOP: Bowdoin student in a reading session. BOTTOM: Student trio at Sarasota.

crowded field of summer offerings, it has "re-branded" itself, adding the word "International" to its title. In the last five to ten years, the number of international students in the program has grown significantly, and Kaplan—a veteran who gives many master classes abroad—has recruited colleagues from Germany, Britain, and Japan as teacher/performers. Among those in attendance this summer will be cellist Nicholas Jones of Great Britain, violinists Chikashi Tanaka of Japan and Zakhar Bron from Germany, and pianist Arie Vardi of Israel. "We've become a bit of a global village," says Executive Director Peter Simmons, "and the kids notice a difference in how Europeans, Americans, and Asians practice and perform."

Like all first-tier festivals, both Sarasota and Bowdoin International take only advanced students, and those by audition only. Sarasota offers full tuition for all accepted participants ("We can't afford it, but we do it anyway," says Wolfe, acknowledging that competition among festivals for top students is rather fierce.) Housing is 65 percent subsidized. At Bowdoin, some 55 percent of the student body has some form of scholarship aid, but only a limited number of full-tuition scholarships are available. Simmons nonetheless reports that Bowdoin's students are happy to pay full or partial tuition for the privilege of coming to the Maine program. Students evidently appreciate the teaching; their yearly written evaluations of the faculty are glowing. "Plus, the atmosphere here is inclusive and noncompetitive," says Simmons, "and the students need a break from the conservatory grind to get totally immersed in making music."

Economics does of course play some role in shaping any festival's structure and content. Sarasota's students come mainly to study chamber music, but participation in the festival orchestra is also compulsory. (Wolfe found that when public concerts omitted orchestra works from the program,

total attendance fell.) A typical week involves attendance at master classes, orchestral rehearsals, and one public performance, as well as many ensemble coachings. An unusual aspect of the Sarasota program is that it is student-driven—the students shape their own curriculum, choosing what they want to play and whom they want to work with. "We want to give the students as much flexibility and initiative as possible," says Wolfe.

Flexibility and initiative are qualities that also characterize Kaplan and Wolfe. Both are, by all reports, impresarios and indefatigable educators, optimistic, energetic, and charming. Yet when asked how they managed to create festivals that lasted forty years, both are modest, stressing the elements of chance and the marketplace.

Says Kaplan, "You've got to have an idea that persists through time, and you've got to be lucky."

Says Wolfe, "A need arose, and I strove to fill it." ■

BOTTOM: Faculty artists in recital at Sarasota; Carol Wincenc, flute; Allan Vogel, oboe; Gregory Hustis, horn; Nancy Goeres, bassoon; Eli Eban, clarinet

