

Composer's Workshop for Everyone

By Pat Rogers

Anyone can compose music. That's right: Anyone.

This is the philosophy of Shelter Island's Bruce Wolosoff, a professional composer who has received commissions to write operas, symphonies, instrumental songs, chamber music and more. His music has been heard in venues and on airwaves around the world.

For the past four years, he has taken up residence at the Hayground School to teach students how to compose music, conduct their pieces and play music written by others. The fifth incarnation of Mr. Wolosoff's Creative Orchestra launched on Monday of this week.

This year, for the first time, community members can experience the process for themselves. On Saturday, condensed minisessions will be open to just about anyone who would like to try their hand at composing. These Music Composition Workshops for the community were born in response to comments and requests from onlookers to the process. According to Mr. Wolosoff, the comments went something like this: "I'd like to try that"; "That looks like fun"; "Can 'anyone' really compose music?"

Moving programs from inside the Hayground School into the community fits perfectly with the school's philosophy, Mr. Wolosoff explained. The school already has a mentor program in which students experience hands-on learning by shadowing local artisans, creative types and businesspeople. The idea is to let students learn from the talent and experience around them, broadening everyone's horizons.

With the Creative Orchestra, the formula has now expanded into a flow chart. The motion starts with the school tapping community talent (Mr. Wolosoff) for the benefit of the students. The students have learned about music and composition. Now their experience will be shared with community members in Music Composition Workshops.

The mini-sessions are designed to discover latent talent in so-far undercover composers. The two-hour workshops, open to adults and children over 8 years old, are condensed versions of the nearly three-week residency program.

In every new Creative Orchestra session, anything can happen and typically does, including small moments of brilliance, discovery and musical beauty. The concept is to combine a basic outline with free-ranging creativity to make music that's exciting to the composer who develops it. Mr. Wolosoff expects the same dynamic will unfold in each of the two-hour workshops.

"It will be fun," Mr. Wolosoff said. "People may discover they are capable of something they didn't know before."

Mr. Wolosoff believes that anyone can create music. Turning traditional educational theory on its head, Mr. Wolosoff believes budding composers should go with their gut, write a composition and learn about music theory along the way. In the traditional model, music students learn an instrument and master music theory before trying their hand at writing music. Mr. Wolosoff's theory has been transforming Hayground students and staff into composers and musicians for four years running. Each year, Mr. Wolosoff becomes the school's composer-in-residence for about three weeks. In daily sessions, the students develop their composition, learn instrumental parts written by their peers, and spend time rehearsing. The residency culminates in a Creative Orchestra concert that's open to the public.

The program itself is open to Hayground staff and parents, expanding the original student project into a multigenerational experience. This year's Saturday mini-sessions are open to all, including those with no affiliation with the Hayground School. To begin, Mr. Wolosoff plants a premise that will allow musical ideas to grow. Compositions have been created in response to a Van Gogh painting and haiku, as well as from the wellspring of pure imagination. Last year, Hayground students created music inspired by the contemporary song, "Go It Alone," by Beck. While doing so, they learned about the musical form of theme and variation.

This year's theme is "metamorphosis," with the idea being to develop two separate musical ideas within one composition.

Students typically compose pieces for multiple instruments that run around two or three minutes.

Just as the musical ideas can derive from any source, any instrument or object that creates sound or tone can be used in the composition. Past concerts have included tin cans, PVC piping, plastic tubing whipped through the air, African and Japanese drums and a balophone (an African instrument similar to a xylophone). Piano, violin, cello and electric guitars have also made the list of orchestra instruments.

Established musical styles are somewhat beside the point in the Creative Orchestra. Sophistication is not an issue in a program that focuses on a meaningful connection between the idea, the music and the composer. To achieve that end, creativity rules, fear is banished and musical chances are taken. Ideas are exchanged and excitement is ignited.

As with other art forms, the aim is to create music from a place of honesty. The hope is to write compositions that are truly loved by their composers. Ultimately, Mr. Wolosoff believes learning about composition and music through the Creative Orchestra has the potential to touch off or enhance a lifetime love of music.

Mr. Wolosoff writes classical, jazz and modern music-inspired compositions. His commissions include works for the Minnesota Ballet, the Columbus Symphony, the Lark String Quartet, the Center for Contemporary Opera, the Ecole Normale de Musique in France and others. A recent commission for the Carpe Diem Quartet premiered in January at the Nabi Gallery in Manhattan. Mr. Wolosoff's work can be heard at <http://brucewolosoff.com>.

The fifth annual Creative Orchestra concert will be held at the Hayground School on Thursday, April 2, at 6 p.m. The school is located at 151 Mitchell Lane, Bridgehampton. Admission is free. On Saturday, March 21, Music Composition Workshops will be held from 10 a.m. to noon and 1 to 3 p.m. at the school. The fee is \$20. Workshops are open to all, age 8 and up, limited to six participants. For workshop reservations or concert information, call 537-7068.





Bruce Wolosoff,second from left,works with fledgling composers at the Hayground School. DANA SHAW



Conducting is just one of the skills covered in workshops led by composer Bruce Wolosoff at the Hayground School. **DANA SHAW**