

Philos Brass Loves to Play, Speak, and Teach

BY KATHERINE JORDAN



PHILOS BRASS WAS FOUNDED IN 2007–08 to fulfill a single residency request that Kindred Spirits Arts Programs (Millford, Pa.) made to Curtis. Members were selected by Dean Robert Fitzpatrick and guided by Director of Community Engagement and Career Development Services Mary Kinder Loiselle.

Preparing meant practicing—repertoire, presentations, and the business of being an ensemble, including personnel changes. Faculty members coached the group. The students crafted a press kit with biographies and photos. They scheduled additional community engagement gigs to hone their speaking skills and to interact with diverse audiences.

And as they prepared for the Milford residency, the members realized that this was valuable work. They stepped into the world of teaching artists—and discovered a model for a fulfilling career. Curtis student Katherine Jordan, horn player for the group, recounts the residency, while alumnus John A Richardson reports on the quintet's visit to Atlanta in January.

Music in Milford

In October Kindred Spirits Arts Programs sponsored a residency for Philos Brass to take its educational programs to the Milford area, east of Scranton. A recital at Milford's First Presbyterian Church capped three days of programs and master classes for approximately

seven hundred students at Wallenpaupack Middle and High schools, Delaware Valley High School, and Dingman-Delaware Middle School.

Throughout the residency Philos Brass—Stanford L. Thompson and Matthew Ebisuzaki, trumpet; Ryan Seay, trombone; Nathan Lodge,

bass trombone; and I, Katherine Jordan, horn—offered insight into playing, listening, and being a musician. We delved into brass quintet repertoire to illustrate how these elements come together. Our professional development activities included interacting with board members during meals, and we enjoyed an autumn break from the city, staying at a beautiful lakeside cabin at a YMCA camp.

“In this rural area, we hoped that our performances would give audiences something different from an everyday assembly ... something out of the ordinary,” Nathan Lodge said.

With educational programs designed to interact with the students, our quintet offered audiences a variety of musical memories. Serious moments, with works by composers such as Gabrieli and Byrd, were balanced by lighter moments (including a bass trombone solo) from Bernstein's *West Side Story*. Bizet's *Carmen Suite* demonstrated the quintet's individual voices. We formed a personal



(Clockwise, from top)
Ryan Seay, Nathan Lodge,
Matthew Ebisuzaki,
Katherine Jordan, and
Stanford L. Thompson

~ PHOTO: L. C. KELLEY

STIRRING UP MUSICAL FIRE

On the last weekend in January, Philos Brass arrived for a four-day residency in Atlanta and couldn't wait to start sharing its music. Saint Mark United Methodist Church (where I am the organist and assistant director of fine arts) hosted Saturday and Sunday events. When Philos Brass warmed up, my own personal concert of Barber's *Adagio* began; I knew immediately that a memorable and successful weekend was about to take place.

Saint Mark is blessed with an immensely talented brass quintet of its own, whose members volunteer their time and talents for many services and occasions beyond that of the obligatory Christmas and Easter, and they were very excited to host Saturday's brass master class, reaching out to Atlanta-area musicians. For their first session, Philos Brass, Saint Mark Brass, and students as young as ten with an instrument they could hardly carry were warming up and playing arpeggios together. Ensembles of trombones, trumpets,

connection with our audiences when each of us told about his or her musical journey that led to life at Curtis.

We held master classes for high school instrumentalists, challenging us to clearly convey ideas to various levels of young musicians, even some who were not brass players. In front of their classmates, each Milford instrumentalist performed a district festival audition piece for us. At times our quintet addressed phrases and musicality, rather than technical details—a tip learned in one of our own coachings at Curtis.

When asked in a master class about his daily schedule, trumpet player Stanford L. Thompson said, “Training to be a musician is like training to be an athlete. Each day we warm up, stretch our muscles with breathing exercises, and work on technique in order to perform the best we can.” Many of the high school students were surprised to learn of our individual practice routines.



Katherine Jordan teaching
~ PHOTO: MARY KINDER LOISELLE

“As brass players,” Stanford continued, “we can’t practice for hours on end. Our practice schedules have to be planned out, making sure each time we sit down, our session is the most efficient use of time.” Comparing musicians to athletes helped the general student population understand a performer’s lifestyle. In the high schools, our conversations with audience members allowed us to express that we had been *normal* high school students, just like the Milford students.

During the Milford residency, Philos Brass aimed to treat each audience with a fresh exuberance and to balance our music with humor. Individual interaction not only made the presentations easier, but also increased our confidence in performance, allowing us

to reveal our finest and most natural playing.

Audience members have written to us since we returned to Philadelphia. They loved hearing our individual stories, about growing up with contrasting backgrounds but all striving to improve and present a common art.

Reflecting upon those memorable experiences of a first residency, Philos Brass has been inspired to continue its community engagement work. In January and February, we are conducting residencies in Atlanta and in Charlotte, N.C. Plans for May and June include an East Coast tour of community engagement programs and recitals. This past December the quintet gained national exposure on an NBC television holiday special from Longwood Gardens.

To follow the travels of Philos Brass, visit www.curtisbrass.com. ☺

Katherine Jordan, from Charlotte, Vt., is a student of Jennifer Montone and entered Curtis in 2008.

and horns started to form, and music rang throughout the halls of this church as they played warmup exercises, scales, and small excerpts. Each member of Philos shared techniques for improvements in tone quality, flexibility, and accuracy, while also explaining—with simplicity and understanding—basic musicianship and phrasing. They passed along methods of the professionals as professionals.

In the second session, the twenty participants gathered in the sanctuary for a chamber music demonstration. Philos imparted the importance of ensemble playing, participation, intonation, and balance. William Byrd’s *Miserere mei*, a choral transcription set for five voices, served as a model. After Philos Brass played an excerpt, participants could hear, see, and discuss what it takes for a tightly knit ensemble to create music and how important this model is for building teamwork and communication.

Participants were rotated into the Philos Brass group one at a time to play the Byrd with them. Eventually Philos had rotated out, leaving it up to the players to perform the Byrd. While tweaking and nudging nuance and gesture out of the participants, they transformed the ensemble into what sounded like Philos Brass themselves! Ten-year old cousins Ian (horn) and Andrew (trombone) Garrison beamed with excitement and passion as they watched, listened, learned, and performed with these talented young musicians.

After lunch—and despite being ready for a nap—we all gathered back in the sanctuary and played the antiphonal brass and organ transcriptions by Eugene Gigout and Charles-Marie Widor. Saint Mark’s Chancel Choir joined the last hour of the master class by singing Charles H. H. Parry’s *Jerusalem* and *I Was Glad*, originally for orchestra, choir, and organ.

Philos had the opportunity to share its music further on Saturday night in a concert with Saint Mark Brass. The two quintets performed together in the Gigout transcriptions and a rousing Widor toccata. Alone Philos played the *Carmen Suite* of Bizet, Byrd’s beautiful lament of the Psalm text “Have Mercy on Me, O God,” a rousing set of seventeenth-century dances imitating two antiphonal brass choirs, Bach’s “Little” Fugue in G minor, Barber’s sublime *Adagio*, and, in a perfect ending to an amazing performance, Bernstein’s *West Side Story*.

Sunday morning was a climactic time in the life of Saint Mark, as Philos Brass, Saint Mark Brass, and Chancel Choir led music for two worship services.

I am so proud to be part of a musical heritage that shares and inspires people to work together, stirring up fire, passion, and desire as Philos Brass has done for Saint Mark. ☺

– John A Richardson (Organ '00)