

# RPYO *News of Note*

Fall 2004

Maureen Placilla, Editor

## *From the Podium*

By Dr. David Harman



### **Togetherness**

Our whirlwind visit to Syracuse proved to be an enjoyable addition to this season's activities. On the surface, it was simply fun to take a mini-tour together, to spend time with friends and to take our musical minds off the hustle and bustle of our busy lives. There's not much time at our own weekly rehearsals to visit and make new friends simply because we're always on task preparing for our concerts. It was great to have some extra time to remind ourselves that being in a special orchestra like ours is more than the beautiful music we make together, it's also the relationships and friendship which we can form through a shared activity, common interest, and sense of dedicated purpose which makes our group special not just in tour years, but all the time. It also makes us a better musical team.

Playing together requires a variety of disparate elements to be successful. First, each of us needs to reach a certain skill level to contribute usefully toward our common goal of preparing and performing our music as well as we can. Beyond that, though, there must be a sense of trust which flourishes as we work together to create that musical result. For instance, if one instrument has a solo which leads to another player or section in a different part of the orchestra, there needs to be an expectation of cause and effect among everyone involved for the music to flow well. In other words, we have to trust each other so that the musical idea gets forwarded and shared in an intelligent, connected and reliable way. That's something that great chamber music and orchestral players do so beautifully and subtly that we often take the results for granted. They listen, look, react and thrive on mutual trust to create music among themselves as a shared experience. They're a team with a common goal.

Part of playing together as a team is this shared experience. Another part is clear intention and, of

course, skill. We're working together this season to develop all of those qualities and our trip to Syracuse certainly helped us in that regard. It was a treat to play some of *The Planets* with others who knew the music well and were able to collaborate in exploring some other points of view about "Mars" and "Jupiter." It was also fun to hear them perform for us and to enjoy the musical aspects of their hard work. Music is usually most exciting when shared live in real time among people who appreciate what goes into making it happen. Recordings, however wonderful, have a different reality from live performances.

It was especially good for us to play the Elgar and Britten in an unusual and new acoustical setting. It provided some real challenges. The sounds mixed in different ways, which meant that we had to really use our eyes to play together. I was reminded of our experiences in Italy when we had to adjust quickly to new environments for each concert, except that we really had no individual rehearsal time to acclimate in Syracuse. Such challenges, while a bit frustrating, are also great for raising awareness and heightening musical trust. I could really feel that our orchestra was working together to make our sound in that hall as unified and musical as it could be. Often we were successful. Even when we weren't, it was still worth the focused effort, which brought us together through that increased awareness.

As we continue to develop through our season, I look forward to refining this awareness of how we work together for united musical results. It's part of the individual and collective joys of playing in a good orchestra and with friends and colleagues who not only appreciate the beauty, magic and wonder of music but also appreciate each other.

### **Contents**

Togetherness.....	1
After the RPYO,.....	2
An Interview with Julia .	3
Remember This?.....	4
RPYO Concert Preview:	4
.....	4
Check This Out!.....	5



## After the RPYO,

### What Then? A Note to RPYO Seniors

Autumn for high school seniors is college-planning time. Many RPYO seniors are struggling with tough decisions: Big university or smallish college? City campus, suburban locale, or small town environment? Music conservatory or liberal arts college? Music major, liberal arts, pre-med or engineering? No wonder, as fall passes on, they often come to rehearsals bleary-eyed!

After our many years of observing RPYO seniors and their college-choice sagas, a few generalities come to mind that I'd like to pass on to our seniors. You have probably heard them all before:

- You can be reasonably happy and challenged at any one of a number of good colleges.
- There is seldom one perfect place.
- No matter how agonizing the process now, you can always make a change if you are not happy.
- Money matters: Aim for what is affordable; big post-college debts are not fun.
- Prestigious college or conservatory names do not necessarily lead to happy experiences or great learning.

### What about music?

Aspiring music majors have to face a reality: it is easier to switch out of a music major than into one, so they have to make important decisions right away that non-music majors can defer. But it is not impossible to switch into music later on if you have strong musical skills and keep them up while experimenting with another major. It may be easier to make the change into a university or college music department than into a conservatory where the focus is much narrower and more technical. There are always graduate programs you can apply to later on at conservatories, if that's your goal.

The key to happiness and success as a music major at a conservatory or university music department is your instrumental teacher. He or she is your mentor, critic, coach, and, ideally, friend to a far greater degree than any faculty member usually is to a non-music major. Your relationship with him or her will affect your self-confidence, motivation, and future opportunities. So

choose carefully, preferably after some lessons you've arranged during your application process.

Non-music majors who want to continue to with their musical interests have other challenges. You will discover that even at the more prestigious universities the orchestras may not be up to your RPYO standards. There may be great student musicians in them, but their commitments are divided. A lot depends on who the conductors are. The University of Rochester is somewhat rare among colleges and universities to have such fine orchestral ensembles, thanks to Dr. Harman and to the presence of the Eastman School. Many excellent student musicians come to the River Campus so they can pursue non-musical majors but still take lessons at Eastman and enjoy the rich musical environment here.

But even where the ensembles may be disappointing, you can still usually find ways to develop your musical selves by taking private lessons through your school's music department, signing up for those music courses you missed out on while in high school, joining a fun pep band, playing in pit orchestras, putting together a string quartet, or developing your vocal skills in an *a capella* group. In fact, at many colleges and universities you'll discover that your RPYO-enriched skills are highly valued by ensemble directors and other students even if you are not a music major. In fact, you may be surprised how good a musician you really are even though music was not your prime interest.

Our main hope for you is that in one way or another you continue to develop your musical knowledge and abilities while in college. It's like money in the bank: it keeps building interest bit by bit. Then, when you leave college, you will have this treasure-trove to draw upon for the rest of your life for emotional support, social connections, intellectual stimulation, and pure pleasure.

Happy college hunting—and finding!

And when you go off to college and beyond, plan to keep in touch with RPYO. You belong to a community here of remarkable people whose lives have been shaped by music. The RPYO can help you stay connected with one another and with the musical world here in Rochester as you create your new lives.

Susan Basu, RPYO Manager



## An Interview with Julia

*This editor was recently afforded the opportunity to interview Julia Figueras, announcer on WXXI-FM, RPYO board member, and narrator for "Young Person's Guide":*

### Q: "How did you become involved with the RPYO?"

**JF:** "I was sent an email asking me to be on the board. I had previously interviewed Dr. Harman so I was well aware of the RPYO and the RPO's involvement. To me it was a huge honor; the RPYO's mission is so important that it is the 'be all and end all.'"

### Q: "What is your musical background? What instruments do you play?"

**JF:** "It all begins with my grandfather, John Figueras. He was 1<sup>st</sup> chair 2<sup>nd</sup> violin with the RPO, so I went to a lot of concerts. My father had a radio show, "Going Baroque," and my two brothers and sister and I took piano, but I'm left-handed so I wasn't very good, and then I wanted to play oboe but I have irregular front teeth . . . so I opted for the trumpet. I played for three years then I shifted to the French horn with its bulky case. When I got to high school I gave it up entirely. My career as a musician I would describe as 'spotty and failed' but my career as an 'appreciator of music' is something else entirely. I love having day-to-day music in my life.

"I spent my high school and college careers focused on theater, beginning as an actress and ending as stage manager. I discovered radio in college and started my radio career in Worcester, MA. Other venues have been in Boston and Concord, NH, and I drifted from very modern rock through jazz, and finally to classical music."

### Q: "You were rehearsing *Young Person's Guide* with a smile beaming on your face; what was going through your mind?"

**JF:** "A couple of things: what an amazing piece of music this is – it is amazing to listen to how Britten wrote it. I was admiring the technical brilliance of the music, and also I was listening to the extraordinary playing.

"When you watch any one of these kids walking down the sidewalk you see an ordinary kid. These are ordinary kids until they pick up their instruments – then they make this huge transition to being extraordinary.

"I love this organization [the RPYO] because of the lack of competition. Many youth orchestras are highly competitive. Look at the repertoire this orchestra does, and the attitude of everyone involved, and I'm sitting there in the midst. What a beautiful piece with these extraordinary kids; it is an amazing thing to be in the middle of it. I interview soloists all the time, and now I'm part of it – so close, physically – to all that energy -- it's great."

### Q: "Who are your musical heroes?"

**JF:** "They range. Bruce Springsteen and Bono for their charitable work, for their fierce support of humanitarian needs.

"I admire Brahms and Dvorak the most – the *German Requiem* and the *Bagatelles* would be my 'desert island' music. Beethoven and Mozart speak most clearly to my soul.

"In jazz: John Lewis, and the Modern Jazz Quartet. And I have a high tolerance for Baroque music, so I'm programming more. Others -- Poulenc, Sibelius, Stravinsky – I adore Stravinsky.

"And without being a suckup: Christopher Seaman and David Harman – what they do for these kids – what music they bring to the kids. The Yings: extraordinary."

### Q: "If music weren't such a large part of your life what might you be doing?"

**JF:** "I might have continued in theater. I might be selling clothes and shoes. I might be teaching English at the high school level.

"But it's very hard to say 'what if.' You take a path, and wishing you had taken another path doesn't work.

### Q: "What non-musical piece of advice will you give to these students?"

**JF:** "Never look back. Never second-guess. And never, never wish for the 'next step.' Really. Enjoy every moment: embrace it. As a Red Sox fan I have learned to embrace what is there.

"Take the world one step at a time."





## Remember This?

*When Maestro Seaman served as guest conductor a few weeks ago he imparted his unique style to all who listened. The following are some nuggets of wisdom from the maestro:*

“This isn't tea time at the vicar's” (while rehearsing *Mars*)  
“You buff young chaps in the percussion -- could you play a little louder, please?”  
(after breaking his baton in the ceiling tile) “That's a stupid place to put a ceiling!”



## RPYO Concert Preview:

The Best of Britain

**Sunday, November 21 at 7:30**

**Hochstein Performance Hall**

**Elgar** *Pomp and Circumstances March, No. 1*

**Britten** *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*

**Julia Figueras, Narrator**

**Holst** *The Planets*

When we consider the origins of our musical classics, we think first of Vienna, Germany, Russia, then Italy and France. England, frankly, does not come quickly to mind. Between the 17<sup>th</sup> century with Henry Purcell and the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the greatest “English” composer was the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century and very German George Frideric Handel. Perhaps England was too engrossed in nurturing the imperialist-era *Pax Britannica* during most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to join the Continent in creating emotion-filled Romantic music and the larger orchestras to perform it.

But the English were listening all during this time, both to music from the Continent and to their own native-grown musical forms. Then, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, English musical creativity burst forth, with the works of Elgar, Vaughn Williams, Holst, and Britten. Though influenced in various degrees by 19<sup>th</sup> century European Romanticism and the late Romantic interest in nationalist musical styles, this new music from England was

distinctively British: often lighter in texture than the Germans, more restrained than the Russians, more down-to-earth than the French.

Here in Rochester, we have had an advantage in being able to hear more frequently than other musical communities these British composers, thanks to a recent RPO Music Director, Mark Elder, and to our present one, Christopher Seaman, both from England. As with any great music, frequent hearing leads to greater appreciation; and this 2004-2005 season will be a great one for building this appreciation. David Harman selected the works by Britten and Holst in part because the RPO will be performing them as well. Our students and families will thus have a double opportunity to get to know them well and perhaps to get to love them.

**Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1*** is, unfortunately, usually the only work most people associate with this exquisitely sensitive composer. It has a catchy tune many of us paraded to during high school graduation ceremonies. But there is more to the music than the admittedly stirring march. It is the way Elgar builds up to and arrives at the march that makes the work especially interesting and worthwhile to perform and listen to.

***The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra: Variations and a Fugue on a Theme of Purcell* by Benjamin Britten** reveals a lighter side of this often brooding and introspective composer of operas, of an intensely-felt war requiem, of haunting songs and other works. The cumbersome title (known in English musical circles as the “*YPGO*”) does not serve well the witty, clearly textured and musically sophisticated style of this very popular work. Originally conceived as a film score on orchestral instruments to commemorate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Purcell's death, the *Young Person's Guide* (as we call it here) is far from juvenile, but clever, dramatic, and engaging to listeners of all ages.

We are thrilled that Julia Figueras, a good and long-time friend of the RPYO, will narrate the Britten piece. She is as interesting and as much fun in person as she is on her WXXI-FM classical music programs.

*page 4*

***The Planets* by Gustav Holst** is, by anyone's standards, a big work, especially for English music of the time (1918). It is massive with many movements, requires a huge orchestra, puts many demands on musicians, and combines delicacy and power, humor and melancholy.

Contrary to what we may assume, living as we do in a scientific age, the subject matter — the planets — has nothing to do with astronomy, but everything to do with astrology. Holst was fascinated by ancient thought, in particular by old Hindu texts that had absorbed ideas on

astrology originating in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq). Using the Roman astrological names for the planets, he gave each—from Mercury to Neptune—a musical character to match its age-old astrological significance. After experiencing this gigantic musical creation, you are sure to observe the sky from a different perspective.

This promises to be a very exciting concert. Please encourage your friends, relatives, and teachers to attend to hear your live performance of these interesting, popular, and rewarding symphonic gems from our English-speaking sister country across the Atlantic.



## Check This Out!

For the latest and greatest RPYO info, or  
\*\*NEW\*\*  
to submit material directly to the newsletter editor, be  
sure to log onto our website:  
[WWW.RPYO.ORG](http://WWW.RPYO.ORG)



***Have you ever*** wanted to be on a radio show?  
Ever seriously consider it? Tune into WXXI-FM on  
Sundays at 5:00 to hear ***From the Top*** featuring the  
best teenage classical musicians in the country. Many  
RPYO members have been on the program –  
so why not give it a shot?

To find out more about the show, to check out the  
people who make it happen and kids who have been  
featured, go to:

[WWW.fromthetop.org](http://WWW.fromthetop.org)

It's great to listen to in the car on the way home after  
rehearsal, too!



Another good musically-themed website associated  
with a weekly radio show is:

[www.classicsforkids.com](http://www.classicsforkids.com)

This interactive site brings classical music to life with  
games, stories about the major composers, and audio  
files of great music. It even includes a musical  
dictionary!