

THE LEITZINGER BASSOON COMPETITION AND FESTIVAL



JANUARY 14-15

The Bard College Conservatory of Music
Annandale-on-Hudson, NY

COMPETITION

Open to ages 16-21

Prizes include:

The Leitzinger Prize - A new Leitzinger Bassoon (estimated value \$29,900)

Performance Prize - A performance with the Bard Conservatory Orchestra

Education Prize - A full scholarship to Bard Conservatory

FESTIVAL

Masterclasses

Performances

Workshops

 Bard College
Conservatory of Music

The Leitzinger Bassoon Competition and Festival

Nora Post
Kingston, New York

January 14-15, 2017
The Bard College Conservatory of Music
Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

The first Leitzinger Bassoon Competition and Festival was as unusual as it was exciting. It was unusual in how it was created, and it was exciting because it is a new competition for very young bassoonists, ages 16 through 21. These young musicians did a wonderful job and, according to Bard pianist Frank Corliss (Associate Director of the Bard Conservatory and Director of the Collaborative Piano Fellows Program), they did an admirable job of convincing everyone that the future of the bassoon is in excellent hands.

The concept of the competition was a collaborative idea between German bassoon maker **Stephan Leitzinger** and New York bassoonist **Marc Goldberg** (faculty at Bard College Conservatory of Music, New England Conservatory of Music, New York University, Columbia University, Juilliard Pre-College Division, Mannes School of Music/The New School, and The Hartt School/University of Hartford). There were three prizes, and it turned out to be a three way split among three different players. But it could have gone a number of ways, and it was also possible that there would be no winners at all, or that everything would go to the same player. It was fascinating to see how it all worked out. But more on the prize later...

The event was held during the weekend of January 14th and 15th. The competition was held on Sunday; the master classes and other presentations were all scheduled on Saturday. There were four master classes, two with Bard faculty bassoonist Marc Goldberg and two with New York bassoonist **Frank Morelli**. The master classes



Marc Goldberg



Stephan Leitzinger



Frank Morelli



were simultaneous, and the idea was that every player would attend one master class with each teacher. Morelli's charisma is legendary, and his classes were a real delight. With the experience of a long and distinguished career to draw from (principal bassoon of the Orpheus Ensemble, principal bassoon of the former New York City Opera, bassoon faculty at The Juilliard School, Yale University, Stony Brook University, Manhattan School of Music, and the Glenn Gould School of the Royal Conservatory in Toronto), he had much to impart to his eager young audience. Marc Goldberg's classes were insightful, thoughtful and provocative in terms of getting people to think about different approaches to their playing. Bard composer Joan Tower joined Goldberg for a working rehearsal of the piano and bassoon version of her *Red Maple* (originally written for bassoon and strings in 2013). Marc Goldberg explained that he had spent about five hours learning what is a very difficult piece during that week. Members of the audience could hardly imagine learning a piece like that in such short time. Goldberg's playing had everything anyone could possibly need for a piece like *Red Maple*, and he just smoked through it, with a very capable Frank Corliss on the piano. They made a terrific team. Joan Tower had a number of insightful suggestions, and it was a pleasure to watch seasoned professionals with such a nice rapport. There was one spot where Joan Tower wanted a slower tempo.



Frank Corliss



Joan Tower



Judges and Winners of the 2017 Leitzinger Bassoon Competition (left to right): judges Frank Morelli and Marc Goldberg; prize winners Nolan Wenik, Eli Holmes, and Traian Sturza; judges Adrian Morejon, Stephan Leitzinger and Richard Ranti.

Goldberg responded by saying that it was actually easier to play it faster. “You mean faster is *easier*?” she asked incredulously. Frank Morelli made a comment in one of his classes that fits in nicely here. He mentioned that he was comfortable living in a house, but he certainly would not be comfortable trying to build one. He went on to say that as a composer, Joan Tower was the builder, telling us we were going to hear from the builder later in the day. Interestingly, Tower suggested to the audience several times that some of us might want to consider trying our hands at composition. As far as I could see, there were no takers.

Stephan Leitzinger’s presence added so much to the event in addition to the very generous gift of a bassoon as a prize. He exhibited his instruments and bocals and was graciously on hand for whatever might be needed. Leitzinger also gave a talk about his bassoons, explaining his own background, and how he got started making bassoons and bocals. This was a very unusual presentation, since instrument makers rarely talk publicly about either the major influences on their designs or how their instruments evolved. Leitzinger’s talk was really a window into how instrument makers think, and that is rare. Leitzinger grew up in a family of bassoon makers. His grandfather worked for Kohlert bassoons, and his father received his training with Püchner bassoons, and later worked for Schreiber bassoons. Leitzinger trained at the Heckel factory in Wiesbaden, Germany, where he later worked in all areas of bassoon manufacture. Unlike most German bassoon makers, though, he also spent some years as a woodwind instrument maker in France, working at Buffet Crampon



and F. Lorée. Leitzinger worked with renowned bassoonist **Maurice Allard** as well as the legendary oboist **Pierre Pierlot** while he was at Buffet, for example. In any case, Leitzinger's background is particularly rich, and it shows. Leitzinger started his own company in 1989, manufacturing Leitzinger bassoons and bocals. Everyone at the competition was commenting on what an amazing ear he has; established professional players were deferring to his opinion when selecting bocals and trying out instruments. And Leitzinger always seemed to get it right, too.

The five judges for the competition included New York bassoonists Marc Goldberg, Frank Morelli and **Adrian Morejon**, bassoon maker Stephan Leitzinger, and **Richard Ranti** of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. There were two rounds of the competition on Sunday, which included a total of fifteen contestants. The first round was held during the morning; it was behind a screen and was closed to the public. The second round was held in the afternoon, and was open to the public. There were eight finalists. They were **Eli Holmes**, **Fabiola Hoyo**, **Joey Lavarias**, **Caroline Miller**, **Connor Reilly**, **Samuel Rouleau**, **Traian Sturza**, and **Nolan Wenik**. During the first round, the contestants played their sonatas and unaccompanied pieces. For the final round, each played a concerto with their pianist. All of the players turned in fine performances, and it was gratifying to hear such a high level of playing from such young bassoonists.

There were three parts to the prize. The first part was the Leitzinger Grand Prize of a professional Leitzinger bassoon. This was awarded to Eli Holmes, 18, a



senior at Vestal High School in Vestal, NY. The Performance Prize consists of a performance as soloist with the Bard College Conservatory Orchestra. It went to Traian Sturza, 19, a sophomore at the Schwob School of Music at Columbus State University in Columbus, GA. The final prize, the Education Prize, went to Nolan Wenik, 18, a senior at Upper Moreland High School in Willow Grove, PA. Wenik was awarded a full scholarship to the Bard College Conservatory of Music five-year double-degree program.

The entire weekend had a special spirit of musical camaraderie that everyone thoroughly enjoyed. What a lovely environment to be in—it was like being inside an enormous bassoon cocoon for two days, and it was a welcome antidote to so many uncertainties in today's world. That alone made the event special. Add to that the excitement of the competition, the educational experience for all, plus the pure fun of the weekend, and it made for a memorable event. I certainly hope that the 2017 Leitzinger Bassoon Competition and Festival will turn out to be the first of many more we can look forward to in future years.

© 2017 by Nora Post. All rights reserved.

Photos by Karl Rabe. Used with permission of Bard College.