

# ASTA/NJ Chamber Music Institute at Kean University



## Composition Program at ASTA/NJ CMI 2010

by Paul Mack Somers

note: Article below summarizes the ASTA/NJ 2010 composition program.  
CMI 2011 will be similar in scope and substance!

Thirteen new student works received their premiers at the ASTA (NJ)-Chamber Music Institute during the summer of 2010. Our two composition majors, Kathy Meyer, a cellist, and Dan Konstantinovsky, a pianist, in one week produced imaginative works. Meyer's duo for violin and 'cello was a lyric piece of beauty and Konstantinosky's trio for violin, viola, and 'cello was a musical argument with a strongly conceived narrative shape. Both works were motivically well structured.

The two young composers met every morning for an hour with instructor Paul Mack Somers to talk over how their projects were coming along and to keep them thinking practically and structurally. Then, while the performing students were in chamber music coaching sessions, the composers went to their dorm rooms or into the practice rooms at Wilkins to work on their pieces alone.

Throughout the process the students were encouraged to bring up technical issues in conversation with the students attending CMI as performers. This was to get the performers used to thinking about what works for them and what doesn't and to try to keep the composers "real", writing playable music.

In one week, having begun their new pieces on Monday, they each produced substantial works three to four minutes in length for the Friday evening composition concert. Both pieces were well received.

CMI also offers an elective composition program for students who attend as performers. For one hour in the late afternoon those students, many of whom have never before composed one note of music, meet with Somers. On Monday they have the most basic lesson in how to manipulate motives. Then they are challenged to compose a solo or duo in which every note is drawn from their original motivic ideas. They learn that this is "the game" that all composers set for themselves. They learn to work "in the dome" where nothing but their composing dare intrude. Composing at an instrument is discouraged, so that the students strengthen their ability to think musically, hearing the sound in their heads and getting the notes down on paper directly.

The results in the first session were five pieces and in the second session six pieces. And these, though composed by students busy preparing chamber works, were mostly several minutes in length. Students who had taken composition elective in past years, were encouraged to write for trio, while in the second week students who had composed solos during the first week were asked to compose for at least a duo.

Both Fridays' composition concerts were attended not only by the full student body, but by various parents

and faculty.

The assistance of counselors Lisa Miller (violin), Neil Aaronson (violin, viola), and Terrence Thornhill (cello) was most appreciated. Not only did they play most of the pieces produced (though various students also played some), but they were supportive in answering composers' technical questions, setting up the performance space, and in having the Friday concerts recorded.