

ASTA/NJ Chamber Music Institute at Kean University



What is a week at ASTA/NJ CMI like?

NOTE:

THIS ARTICLE WAS WRITTEN IN 2006 FOLLOWING OUR SECOND COMPLETE SEASON. IT GIVES AN ACCOUNT OF WHAT A WEEK AT ASTA/NJ CMI IS LIKE FOR PARTICIPANTS.

ASTA CMI AT KEAN UNIVERSITY COMPLETES SECOND SEASON!

Following upon the success of its inaugural year in 2005, the American String Teacher's Association of New Jersey (ASTA/NJ) ran its second annual Chamber Music Institute (ASTA CMI) at Kean University in Union, New Jersey this past summer. Operating in two sessions this year (session I: July 30 – August 5, 2006; session II: August 5 – 12, 2006), a total of 56 students and 22 faculty/staff participated in ASTA CMI nearly doubling the number of those taking part last year.

What is ASTA CMI?

For those unfamiliar with this program, ASTA CMI is a residential classical music camp for students 8th grade – 1st year college focusing on chamber music performance. ASTA CMI is open to all instruments in the ASTA 'family' – that is to say all of the traditional string instruments (violin, viola, cello & double bass) as well classical guitar. Participants – most of whom hail from the NJ, NY, PA area with some arriving from as far away as Tennessee and Virginia - are assigned to work with a trio, quartet or quintet throughout the week. Groups meet twice daily for coaching sessions with CMI artist faculty, perform in a master class for the visiting guest artist string quartet (*Daedalus Quartet*, session I or *Borromeo Quartet*, session II) and are featured in a public concert that marks the conclusion of each session.

Students also participate in Chamber Orchestra as well as in instrumental sessions led by CMI Artist Faculty members. Double bassists enjoyed additional sessions for Double Bass ensemble led by faculty member Linda McKnight and classical guitarists enjoyed sessions focusing on finger style jazz for the classical guitarist led by guest clinician Michele Fiorindo.

ASTA/NJ Chamber Music Institute at Kean University



What is a week at ASTA/NJ CMI like?

ASTA CMI's two sessions also featured concerts by Kean University's acclaimed *Concert Artist Faculty*, presentations by violin maker Charles Ruffino and music technology expert James Roberts as well as a master class, Q&A session and evening recital presented by the Daedalus Quartet (session I) or the Borromeo Quartet (session II).

ASTA CMI Day-by-Day

Each session of ASTA CMI began on a Sunday with student registration starting at 2pm run by Director Christopher Kenniff, Assistant Directors Mary Ann Mumm & Peg Roberts and counselors Justin Lee, Lisa Miller, Kimberly Syvertsen, Rosemary Topar & Daniel Mumm. Registration is followed by dormitory check-in and a campus tour. Dinner and a concert featuring Kean University's world class *Concert Artist Faculty* rounds out day one. For the students, day one provides an opportunity to meet one another while getting settled on campus, hear a great a great concert of chamber music and – perhaps most importantly – to find out what their repertoire assignment is for the week! Many practiced late into the evening trying to get a head start on the music they would begin coaching the very next day.

A typical day at CMI begins with breakfast at the cafeteria in University Center followed by Chamber Orchestra reading sessions (Monday, Friday) or instrumental sessions (Tuesday, Friday) directed by ASTA CMI faculty members. Double bassists have the extra challenge (and priveledge) of participating in Double Bass Ensemble with Professor Linda McKnight (MSM & MSU Faculty member) after an early breakfast and before the orchestra / instrumental sessions even begin! For guitarists (who do not generally participate in orchestra) there were special sessions in fingerstyle jazz for the classical guitar presented by guest clinician Michele Fiorindo. Additionally, during one orchestra session, guitarists Pierre Ferryra- Mansilla and Ryan Johnson performed the solo part to Vivaldi's Concerto in D with orchestra under the expert direction of Kean Concert Artist &

ASTA/NJ Chamber Music Institute at Kean University



What is a week at ASTA/NJ CMI like?

NJSO member Brett Deubner. This was a rare treat for guitarists who often do not have the opportunity to play this repertoire with an actual orchestra!

The next activity on the ASTA CMI Daily Schedule is the first of two chamber music coachings in the day. Ensemble & coach repair to their assigned room from 10:30am-12:00pm where they work intently on the repertoire they are preparing for master class performance on Wednesday and final concert on Saturday. As ASTA/NJ President (and one of ASTA CMI's Assistant Directors) Mary Ann Mumm is fond of saying, "each day at CMI is like a month. You won't believe the progress students will make in so short a time and neither will they!" Indeed, students who initially doubt their ability to play their assigned repertoire in the time frame of ASTA CMI make tremendous progress on a day-to-day basis due to their own diligence & hard work combined with the intensity of the time spent with expert faculty guidance. Counselors and faculty who reside in the dorms alongside the students attest to the many practice hours logged by students preparing for the next day's coaching sessions & coming performances.

Continuing through a typical day at CMI, lunch at noon is followed by free time (used for recreation, private lessons, personal practice time or additional rehearsal as determined by the student), a faculty mini recital or, on Wednesday, a three hour master class (followed by Q&A session) with the guest artist string quartet (Daedalus Quartet or Borromeo Quartet). Occasionally I will be asked if there isn't too much free time in the daily schedule of ASTA CMI. In fact the opposite appears to be true! Students uniformly convey the need for more rehearsal time (without coaches) for groups to work on their own at applying what they have learned during coaching sessions. Students frequently request that more personal time for individual practice be built into the schedule in future years. It is hard to convey at the outset of ASTA CMI how much effort is required of the students in order to meet the performance goals set before them. We are working at ways to build more practice/rehearsal time into the schedule while still providing adequate instruction and supervision for all students.

ASTA/NJ Chamber Music Institute at Kean University



What is a week at ASTA/NJ CMI like?

Afternoon coaching sessions last from 2-4pm and are followed by another session of personal time and then dinner. Just so readers of this article don't think that we are slave drivers at ASTA CMI, we do try to have fun with evening presentations following dinner and post-presentation pizza or ice cream parties in the dorms! Our two presenters at ASTA CMI were Charles Ruffino (violin maker and owner of the Long Island Violin Shop) and James Roberts (musical polymath, owner & chief recording engineer of Trinity Park Recording Services and director of Music Technology at Randolph HS!). Mr Ruffino's sessions dealt with the topic of instrument care and *The Art & Lore of the Violin*; Mr. Robert's sessions presented overviews of the development of music technology culminating in amazing demonstrations of the Theremin and several new music software applications. Both presentations were entertaining, informative and extremely well received presenting a positive diversion from the rigors of rehearsal & practice!

Wednesday evening is a special opportunity for CMI participant ensembles to perform for one another and faculty what they will perform for the following day's master class. For the most part, this is a simple run-through session (as opposed to a coaching session where extensive critique from faculty is expected); nonetheless, comments on presentation and to a lesser extent performance come from faculty & other students. In both sessions extra time for ensemble *sans faculty* rehearsal (in addition to scheduled coaching sessions) was created on Thursday morning as per student request to help prepare and fine tune for the afternoon master class performance.

Thursday afternoon in both sessions was truly something special. The Daedalus Quartet (session I) and Borromeo Quartet (session II) presented inspirational and informative classes that for many of the students marked the high point of their entire CMI experience. ASTA CMI participant (violinist) Cameron Howe of Goodlettsville, Tennessee wrote "The Borromeo master class was incredible... the Borromeo Quartet will be one of my fondest memories!" Both quartets emphasized the need for imagination in expressive music making while offering

ASTA/NJ Chamber Music Institute at Kean University



What is a week at ASTA/NJ CMI like?

many practical suggestions for dealing with issues of how best to improve ensemble cohesiveness, performance, intonation, cuing, etc... A special treat for all came in the form of a computer animation created by Borromeo Quartet violinist Nicholas Kitchen of the *Vivace* movement from Beethoven's *String Quartet op.135* which accompanied the Borromeo Quartet as they performed the actual music composed by Beethoven to start their class at ASTA CMI! Both quartets gave classes that truly 'put a charge' into the rest of the ASTA CMI week.

Thursday evening of Session I featured the Daedalus Quartet, while session II featured the Borromeo Quartet in concert in Wilkins Theatre at Kean University. Programs for these concerts were a marvelous combination of the traditional and the unexpected. The Daedalus Quartet astounded all with their colorful, dynamic and technically brilliant performance of Bela Bartok's *String Quartet no.3, Sz.85*. Their Beethoven *String Quartet op. 18/1* was charmingly rendered bringing out Haydn-esque qualities in this great early quartet. While their Debussy quartet was a marvel of sinuous virtuosity, fleeting textures and vivid instrumental colors – all sublimely rendered.

The Borromeo Quartet began their program with Pulitzer Prize winning composer George Crumb's harrowing and brilliant *Black Angels (Image I) Thirteen images from the dark land* for amplified string quartet. A daunting task to perform, the Borromeos played Crumb's work – a veritable *tour de force* of instrumental color, daunting (and unorthodox) virtuosity and near theatrical gesture - to perfection. The 'assist' they received in the form of a rain storm during the *God Music* portion of Crumb's score was a remarkable addition to this already remarkable music! Beethoven's *Quartet op.135* which immediately followed *Black Angels* to end the program was performed with precision and profound understanding of how to render the full (and immense) range of expression found in this marvelous, late quartet.

ASTA/NJ Chamber Music Institute at Kean University



What is a week at ASTA/NJ CMI like?

Friday at ASTA CMI is a relatively easy day for faculty as the students are so charged up following the quartet master class and concert that the remaining work is seemingly done of its own accord! The students bring so much energy, enthusiasm and passion to their rehearsal sessions that faculty has little to do but point that energy in the right direction. Friday evening of session I featured a special home-cooked meal by Jim Roberts (that's right, music technology guy Jim Roberts, also husband of ASTA CMI Assistant Director Peg Roberts and very fine chef to boot!). Session II did pretty well Friday evening making due with Chinese food provided by a local restaurant to provide something different from the cafeteria's entrées.

Saturday is the **big day** for students and faculty at ASTA CMI. The final concert featuring student performances is held in beautiful Kean Hall and represents the culmination of much effort on the part of all involved with ASTA CMI – students especially! An audience comprised primarily of friends and family members as well as some from the Kean University campus community heard marvelous programs including amazingly diverse repertoire from Schubert's *Trout Quintet* and Beethoven's *Quartet op.59/3* to Dohnanyi's *Serenade in C* and Boccherini's famous '*Fandango*' *Guitar Quintet*. Although we (directors and faculty) believe from the outset in the student's ability to perform the repertoire assigned, it is genuinely thrilling to hear it all come together with ensembles exceeding all of our expectations. To see the students gain such enjoyment out of performing chamber music and to see them realize what they are capable of truly makes the whole experience worth all of the challenges of putting ASTA CMI together! As director, I am often asked how we are able to place students in ensembles without auditions. The answer is that our application process requires the applicant to fill out a rather exhaustive *musical experience form* while the applicant's instructor submits information about the student (confidentially) concerning the student's abilities in several key areas. This information combined with a *very* late evening for the ensemble committee has proved to be very successful in placing students in appropriate ensembles. The first coaching session (Monday morning) is followed by a faculty meeting in which we review

ASTA/NJ Chamber Music Institute at Kean University



What is a week at ASTA/NJ CMI like?

how each group did working together. Any changes in personnel or repertoire are made prior to the Monday afternoon coaching session. In the three sessions of ASTA CMI to date, we have had very few changes to make thus reinforcing for us the feasibility of our process used to assign groups. That said, next year we will offer applicants the option of submitting a recording representative of their performance level.

- Christopher Kenniff
ASTA/NJ CMI Director