

TEACHING & PERFORMING:

An Ideal Balance

Because the Jack W. Geltz Distinguished Piano Chair enables the Music School to present high quality concerts, it also helps to educate high quality musicians.

At colleges and universities everywhere, teaching, service and scholarship are the words used to describe faculty accomplishments. In the field of music, however, scholarship often means performance.

And by offering faculty performances, music schools do more than provide a showcase for talent or a benchmark for scholarly achievement. Concerts and recitals are important tools for improving the educational experience of students and effective ways to enhance their public image.

At Duquesne University's Mary Pappert School of Music, performance has long been an important component of its public outreach and educational philosophies. Now, thanks to an endowment that established the Jack W. Geltz Distinguished Piano Chair, performance at Duquesne is making a fine music program even stronger.

The Geltz Chair, a full-time, tenure track faculty position, was created by a financial gift from Jack W. Geltz, an avid classical music fan who received his bachelor's degree in 1949 and a master's degree in 1984 from Duquesne. The Geltz endowment makes it possible for the Music School to have an exceptional performer and teacher like David Allen Wehr, who was appointed to the Geltz Chair when it was created in 2006.

Wehr, who previously was Duquesne's first Hillman Distinguished Professor, brings 30 years of performing experience to the classroom. According to Wehr, the Geltz endowment provides more than a guarantee that he can continue performing; the Geltz chair makes it possible for him to be a teacher and a performer, the perfect position for guiding the next generation of pianists.

In fact, Wehr believes that concerts may benefit music students in this way: performances help the faculty who take the stage because when teachers undergo the ordeal of getting ready to play, they are far better able to impart the essential skills of the performer to their students. Those performance skills are the intangibles that make it possible for a musician to truly master the instrument and the music, rare abilities that transform complex but rote tasks into art. They cannot effectively be taught by the uninitiated, Wehr says.

"These are not things a person is born knowing," Wehr says. "Someone has to pass on their knowledge to you, and one of the biggest contributions I can make here at Duquesne is to draw upon my years of experience, my years of traveling and performing, and bring it to bear in very specific ways to the students I work with, one-on-one."

Edward Kocher, dean of the School of Music, agrees that faculty performance improves teaching. For one thing, he points out, performances provide an excellent opportunity for teachers to model the behavior they

expect in their students, particularly when the performances are of the highest quality, like *Brahms on the Bluff*, a project now wrapping up its final season. This three-year series of concerts presented the complete chamber music of Johannes Brahms and featured Wehr, the principal pianist and artistic director for the series, along with faculty performers and special guest artists.

Students not only attended the concerts, they were very much aware of the preparation for the performances.

"We're an educational institution, and putting on concerts like this is really for the students," Kocher says about *Brahms on the Bluff*. "These concerts can have life-changing possibilities when students hear this music played at this level in their own school and are taught by the musicians who perform it."

Elaborating on how performance makes better teachers, Wehr comments that "for one thing it forces me to broaden my repertoire, and if I'm teaching something that I have performed many times, I simply know so much more about the work—not just how to perform it with precision in the studio, but how to perform it onstage,

with other musicians, whose sound output must be balanced with mine."

It works the other way too.

"Teaching makes me a better performer," Wehr says, adding, "I think most teachers would agree that it makes them better performers. Teaching requires a musician to articulate verbally what they normally would do automatically, and forces them to refine their ideas, not only about technicalities such as fingering and volume, but ideas related to expression and style, the elements of artistry that separate master from journeyman."

Along with helping to enhance the quality of instruction, *Brahms on the Bluff* also shows how performances can help boost a music school's reputation. Immensely successful, *Brahms on the Bluff* has attracted record numbers of concertgoers to PNC Recital Hall, with overflow seating needed at some of the performances. But more important than the size of the audience is the fact that for many it was their first concert at Duquesne. More important still was the audience's *reaction*.

Kocher says that *Brahms on the Bluff* succeeded more than



Dean Edward Kocher, David Allen Wehr, Jack W. Geltz and President Charles J. Dougherty.

Sunday, February 24

Brahms on the Bluff: The Clarinet Chronicles

James Campbell, clarinet

Guenko Guechev, bass-baritone

Donald McInnes, viola

Charles Stegeman and Rachel Stegeman, violin

David Allen Wehr, piano

Anne Martindale Williams, cello

3 p.m./PNC Recital Hall

\$10 Suggested Donation

Friday, February 29

Duquesne University Wind Symphony and Symphony Band

Robert C. Cameron, conductor

Performance for the CBDNA Conference, Washington, D.C.

8 p.m./The United States Marine Band Concert Hall

Sunday, March 30

Duquesne University Symphony Orchestra

Sidney Harth, music director

The Dean's Concert

Works by Ezra Laderman, Former Dean, Yale School of Music

Dean Robert Sirota, Manhattan School of Music

Marilyn Taft Thomas, Former Head, Carnegie Mellon University School of Music

Concerto No. 14 in E flat, KV 449 by W.A. Mozart with soloist

Dean Robert Blocker, Yale School of Music, piano

8 p.m./Carnegie Music Hall, Oakland

\$10 Suggested Donation

☛ Broadcast Live on 89.3 WQED-FM

Sunday, April 6

Pappert Women's Chorale, Pappert Men's Chorale,
and Voices of Spirit

Christine Jordanoff and Richard Teaster, conductors

3 p.m./Epiphany Church

Thursday, April 10

The Duquesne Contemporary Ensemble

David Stock, conductor

8 p.m./PNC Recital Hall

\$10 Suggested Donation

Monday, April 14

Duquesne University Jazz Ensemble

Mike Tomaro, director

Featuring Chuck Loeb

8 p.m./Manchester Craftsmen's Guild

Friday, April 18, 8 p.m. and Sunday, April 20, 3 p.m.

Don Giovanni

Opera Workshop

Guenko Guechev, director

Duquesne University Symphony Orchestra

Sidney Harth, music director

Carnegie Public Library Music Hall, Carnegie

\$10 Suggested Donation

Saturday, April 19

Duquesne University Wind Symphony and Symphony Band

Robert C. Cameron, conductor

8 p.m./Ballroom, Power Center

\$10 Suggested Donation

For more information, please call 412.396.6083.

anticipated mainly for the way the public responded to the performances. "Literally dozens of people have approached me after the concerts to thank us for putting on the Brahms concerts," says Kocher, adding that this unprecedented level of appreciation is highly gratifying.

Brahms on the Bluff has also been an example of exemplary collaboration among musicians. "It's not about financial compensation at this level," says Kocher. "It's about artistic expression and joy."

"It takes a huge commitment from the musicians," adds Wehr. "We work very, very hard to prepare for them, but the actual concerts are sheer joy for us because the musicians want to perform this music."

The Geltz Chair provides the financial resources to make the Mary Pappert School of Music's piano performance capabilities permanent. That is important because the piano is the polestar of music. The instrument's essential role in music history is indisputable, and the piano's sonic range and expressive potential continue to cinch key roles for it in every musical genre. Today, as in centuries past, piano soloists earn accolades and command salaries envied but seldom surpassed by other musicians.

Moreover, the instrument's intuitive keyboard design offers the promise—if not the fulfillment—of undraping music's secrets, and so the piano has served for centuries as the learner's chalkboard and creator's workshop. For those reasons, every Duquesne music major, his or her instrument of choice notwithstanding, studies piano for four semesters.

Those factors put the piano program at the heart of a music school, and make it imperative that the school has a strong piano faculty. Even before the Hillman Chair, Duquesne's piano faculty was a widely respected and accomplished group of teachers and musicians. However, having a faculty member teach and perform at the highest levels has nevertheless been an undeniable boon to the program.

In addition to all of its other benefits, performance may be credited with attracting new students. Wehr claims that the majority of the graduate students he now teaches come to Duquesne specifically to study with him, an indication, he feels, that the students are aware of his record as a performer. Kocher agrees, adding that Wehr, with a reputation formed by performance and competition, has attracted not just more but more accomplished prospects to the graduate piano program.

For Wehr, his appointment to the Geltz Chair, and the Hillman Chair before that, has been the opportunity of a lifetime—one that enables him to prepare a new generation of pianists for the concert stage and simultaneously perform the music he loves with friends and colleagues:

"To me this situation is close to ideal." ■



By Richard Tourtellott