

### Consort-Cooperative

Something genuinely unique transpired in July at the 44th annual Conclave of the VdGSA. After a rigorous recruitment campaign and audition process, 14 Consort Cooperative members from across North America and even further afield gathered at Saint Olaf College for an intense week of learning and music-making. As with participants in the other Conclave programs, the membership represented a wide demographic – skilled performers and scholars of exceptional professional standards and varied philosophies, many of whom had never played together before.

If any of us had preconceptions of how this experience would unfold, our expectations were quickly exceeded by the reality of the Consort Cooperative Program. I was most impressed with the exceptionally positive attitudes and supportive atmosphere amongst my colleagues – an infectious spirit that pervaded the entirety of the Conclave experience.

I was also awed by the demanding and varied repertoire that my colleagues brought to coach. They all brought a wealth of knowledge with them, and I was quickly delighted to find how quickly I found acceptance among them. All of the participants felt safe to share their knowledge and experience in an atmosphere of mutual respect and support. The Consort Cooperative provided a safe environment that was ideal for experimentation with unfamiliar works as well as to hone the subtleties of articulation and interpretation of familiar examples from our rich and diverse standard consort repertoire.

The Consort Cooperative broke into small groups to explore literature by Gesualdo, Tye, Dowland, Sainte-Colombe, as well as the 'Seventh Brandenburg Concerto', an arrangement of Bach's Third Sonata for Bass Viol and Harpsichord that used the same instrumentation as the Sixth Brandenburg Concerto.

An essential aspect of the Cooperative was an intimacy that occurred through our interactions during our coaching sessions. The purpose was to survey unfamiliar repertoire as well as to attain a deeper comprehension and appreciation of the interaction and breadth offered by the viol consort literature.

The intimacy that was created during the coaching sessions was best captured at our Friday afternoon Mini-Concert. The program emphasized great variety: from Dufay to Charpentier, from Simpson to the consort literature of Gibbons, Jenkins and Ward. In addition, as an avid lover of contemporary music, it was a joy to hear the novel percussive and timbral effects present in Peter Sculthorpe's *Djilile* as well as in Ken Perlow's adaptation of Max Raimi's arrangement of *Mr. Sandman*, performed at the opening of Saturday's town meeting.

A spirit of cooperation, understanding, and exploration pervaded the program as we rehearsed and coached each other and integrated ourselves into the surrounding Conclave community for ad hoc consorts after hours. Avoiding isolation, it was essential to the participants of the collective that we take every opportunity to play and interact with the full Conclave community, something we found an enriching and enjoyable experience. We wanted to benefit from the wealth of knowledge and experience that surrounded us, be it through lessons with faculty or interactions with other Conclave participants. Amongst my personal highlights of the week was an impromptu reading of the Dowland consort music with Martha Bishop and lutenist John Lenti that ran well into the night.

I owe many thanks to all of the participants of the Consort Cooperative for a deeply engaging and enjoyable learning experience. Many of us noted that the program was a highlight of our year. As participants in the program, we owe much to Joëlle Morton for her inspired vision and to Joëlle and Marie Dalby for their tireless organization of the program, to committee advisors Martha Bishop, Wendy Gillespie and Alice Renken, as well as to the dedicated board members of the VdGSA who

helped make this experience possible. Congratulations to all involved for a successful second Consort Cooperative program! As the program continues to evolve and mature, I hope that we can all continue to engage in such fruitful artistic endeavors at Conclave and take the concepts and collaborative spirit back to our communities to share with others.

☞ Phillip W. Serna, Chicago, IL

*Phillip Serna is a freelance musician in the Chicago area and is completing the Doctor of Music degree at Northwestern University where he studied with Chicago Symphony member Michael Hovnanian on double bass and Newberry Consort founder Mary Springfels on viola da gamba.*



Consort Cooperative Consort Cooperative Participants – (Front Row, Left to Right) Phillip Serna, Andrew Saunders, Liam Byrne, Tobi Szüts, Jennifer Barron, Brooke Green & Celia Olson (Back Row, Left to Right) Joëlle Morton, Marie Dalby, Webster Williams, Heather Miller Lardin, Virginia Kaycoff, Ken Perlow & Josh Lee