

## SONIC ESCAPE REVIEW FEB. 19 2014

### SARNIA CONCERT ASSOCIATION

by David Nichols

After our last exciting concert featuring Sonic Escape, several of our subscribers asked me how I was ever going to be able to review such a grand performance. I suggested that I could fill the review page with the word, **PERFECT**, in a very large type! However, after receiving a letter in response to the concert from Jessica McKay, Head of the Music Department at LCCVI in Petrolia, my problem was solved.

Jessica wrote: "What a pleasure for the ears! I was sitting there captivated for the entire concert, and enjoyed such a diverse program. As I was telling you after the concert, I could not believe Sonic Escape's impeccable tuning and the incredible depth and dimension of sound that it brought to their performance. I chuckled when they mentioned how difficult it was to tune that combination of instruments, and all I could think of was how successfully they were doing it! I was so impressed by their astonishing musicianship. Quite often, three highly accomplished musicians sound like three individual soloists playing at the same time, but this was an incredible blend of virtuosity, weaving such a remarkable mosaic of sound. I cannot say enough good things about this concert! I have been listening to their CD ever since!"

Maria Millar's original compositions written specifically for Sonic Escape are imaginative and charming. Her music often incorporates dance and drama. On the Sonic Escape web site, Maria has a short video entitled, "Advice to Composers." She makes the following suggestions: "Try everything! Attack from as many directions as possible. Improvise, arrange music, write original music, and combine your music with other art forms. Go with what you feel! Don't worry about being accepted."

*Bach in Ireland* was a perfect example of Maria's following her own advice. After performing movements of Bach's music, an Irish "accent" was applied resulting in improvisational dancing. The message is that we need to get creative with classical music.

I always told music students that the most important music is the music that they compose. The first year high school music students completed the semester with a final music project. They were required to compose a piece of music for the instrument that they had started playing four months ago, and perform the piece for the class. The creative process was very carefully organized, presenting them a pallet from which to

choose musical materials such as pitches, durations, and dynamics. Every composition had to have a title. The results of this creative exercise were outstanding, and many of the students' works would bring tears to your eyes through their beauty and emotional expression.

For jazz musicians, the ability to improvise is expected. Why can't we add this expectation to classical musicians' list of skills? After all, at one time concert pianists were expected to improvise cadenzas for all the great piano concertos.

I only mention this because it is so exciting to find musicians like Sonic Escape who are going into the classrooms to promote musical composition through improvisation. Back in the 1960's when Murray Schafer was having us compose (improvise) "soundscapes," he was considered to be a radical and his message was not taken seriously. Perhaps some of his creative ideas are finally gaining the acceptance they deserve.

Bach's *Air* from the *Suite for Orchestra No. 3 in D major* was written around 1731. Bach composed only four works in this form. The music is a collection of dances and was very popular at garden parties. Bach wrote out only the violin and basso continuo parts (a bass line with harmonies) and one of his famous sons, C.P.E. Bach wrote out the trumpet, oboe and timpani parts. A student of Bach's, Johann Krebs, wrote out the second violin and viola parts.

The *Air* is one of the most familiar pieces of all Baroque music. An arrangement by the German violinist, August Wilhelmj, (1845-1908) has come to be known as *Air on the G String* because Wilhelmj transposed the melody lower so it could be played on only the lowest string of the violin, namely, the G string, resulting in the famous title and from a musical point of view, a much deeper resonance of tone. The *Air* was also the first work by Bach ever recorded.

Sonic Escape received a long and enthusiastic standing ovation for a beautiful dynamic program. This trio has a brilliant musical future!