

Fourth time's the charm: Blue Streak celebrates CIM

by Jarrett Hoffman



Any graph tracking cases of coronavirus is a looping one: up, down, up, down. So if the timing is just unlucky enough, the same program could potentially be postponed once, twice, thrice...

That hypothetical has been a reality for the Blue Streak Ensemble. The group aimed to celebrate the Cleveland Institute of Music's centennial in 2020 with a set of three programs that would

include, in part, music by composers connected to CIM. But new variants, new spikes, and rescheduled student recitals have meant cycling through one date after another.

So composer and Blue Streak director Margaret Brouwer had a proclamation to make during our recent conversation on Zoom. "We're giving these concerts no matter what!" she said with a laugh. "Even if we have to stand in the street and play."

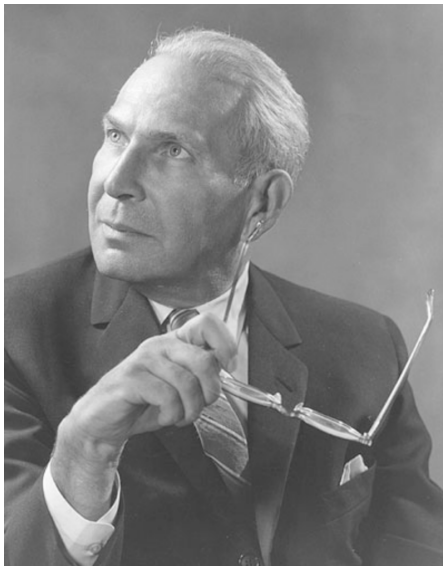
After managing to make one of the concerts happen in late 2021, Blue Streak will complete the trilogy on Sunday, [May 22](#) and Tuesday, [May 24](#). Both events will take place at 7:00 pm in CIM's Mixon Hall, and both are free, though reservations are required (click the links above).

"I really think the audiences will love both of these concerts," Brouwer said. "There's a lot of variety — exciting music, and beautiful melodic music."

If there's one composer particularly fitting for a CIM centennial celebration, it's Ernest Bloch, who was also the school's first "musical director," or what we would now call president. "They called upon him to get things started," Brouwer said. "And he would of course go on to become a very famous composer."



Tuesday's program begins with his 1950 *Concertino* for flute, viola, and piano. "He's best known for his Jewish character pieces, like *Schelomo* for cello and orchestra," Brouwer said. "But this is a great piece, and the musicians are having a great time rehearsing and preparing it."



Next up in the historical timeline on Tuesday is Marcel Dick with his *Four Elegies and an Epilogue* for solo cello. Dick began teaching at CIM in 1946 and remained on the faculty for over two decades, spending much of that time as head of the composition department. "He also played viola in The Cleveland Orchestra," Brouwer said, "and actually he studied composition with Kodály before leaving Hungary. So he's got terrific credentials."

It was at CIM that Marcel Dick taught a composer by the name of Donald Erb, who himself would go on to chair the school's composition department for decades. Erb will be represented on Sunday's program by his 1988 solo clarinet piece *Woody*, inspired in part by Woody Herman, as well as a visit to Cleveland by another esteemed clarinetist: Richard Stolzman.

Brouwer recalled that Erb quoted his former teacher fairly often — and not always in the most positive way, she said, laughing. "Sometimes he would say, 'Well, Marcel said this, but...' And that's completely natural because everyone has their own style and opinion. I think he was a very important teacher for Donald Erb."

From Marcel Dick and Donald Erb, we move to Margaret Brouwer herself, who was once a student of Erb's, and who became his successor as department head at CIM. Though you won't hear her work on these two occasions, her piece



Light was featured in the December 2021 program, along with *I Breathe Poetry* by fellow Cleveland-based composer Dolores White — who *also* studied with Erb.

“There haven’t been that many composition teachers at CIM over the course of this entire time,” Brouwer noted. “Marcel Dick, Donald Erb, then I came after him, and then Keith came after me.” That would be Keith Fitch, who took over from Brouwer in 2008. Fitch not only completes the arc of CIM composition chairs in this set of concerts, but also carries on the pedagogical link: he too counts Erb as an important mentor.



Tuesday’s program will include his *Come soon, come soon*, a title that came from the words of W.H. Auden — though not from his poetry. Fitch came upon a photo of Auden taken shortly before his death. According to the caption, photographer Yousef Karsh asked the poet about returning to capture his portrait again.

As Fitch writes in the program notes:

Auden, perhaps sensing his own days were numbered, replied, “Come soon, come soon.” As I began planning a new piece for cello and piano, Auden’s words continued to haunt me, eventually coloring the atmosphere and mood of much of the work.

Aside from Bloch, Dick, Erb, and Fitch, works by five other highly accomplished composers populate the two programs: Jennifer Higdon, Derek Bermel, Melinda Wagner, Judd Greenstein, and Missy Mazzoli. None of them have CIM connections — Brouwer chose them for the ways in which their music contrasts with that of the Clevelanders, “and because they’re all wonderful living composers,” she said. “I think it’s important to show what’s going on right now.”

Through three postponements, has anything about the program changed? “Well, some of the players have, because their lives have changed,” Brouwer said. “But the musicians on these concerts are fabulous. I couldn’t ask for better.”

Those performers include flutists Mary Kay Fink and Sean Gabriel, clarinetist Alex Abreu, trumpeter Larry Herman, violinists James Thompson and Mari Sato, violist Yael Senamaud, cellists Robert Nicholson and Khari Joyner, pianists Arseny Gusev and Shuai Wang, percussionist Luke Rinderknecht, and conductor Dean Buck.

Back to Brouwer herself, I was curious to hear about her relationship with CIM after retiring from her teaching post in 2008.

“I go back to hear concerts fairly often,” she said, “and I actually went to commencement on Saturday. I know a lot of the people still, and even the new people I know now. It’s a wonderful school — the people are wonderful, the students are fabulous. So when I was there for commencement on Saturday, I thought to myself, I’m just so happy that I have these friends and these wonderful musical experiences.”

Published on ClevelandClassical.com May 18, 2022.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)