

THE MANNES INSTITUTE

FOR ADVANCED STUDIES IN MUSIC THEORY

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INSTITUTE ON MUSICAL AESTHETICS

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OPENING SPEECH

Welcome to Chicago and the tenth Mannes Institute on Musical Aesthetics. Kicking off this event, especially outside of New York, is an exciting experience for me. To quote the Bard, it's the one time of year I'm dressed in a little, brief authority. In between, I have, as Thoreau said of himself, a real genius for staying at home. This town is full of storied associations, and its university synonymous with rigorous creativity. The aesthetics of our surroundings alone are enough to inspire high thoughts. I'm grateful to the school, and my distinguished colleagues affiliated with it, for the opportunity to convene in these hallowed halls. Huddled together in this most venerable institution, in this most American city, we'll explore not only the aesthetics of music, but the aesthetics of ourselves, who we are as scholars and colleagues, and what our profession, at its noblest, might hope to attain.

The Mannes Institute is a decade-long experiment in humanistic learning. We're a nomadic community, in a constant state of flux and realignment, with new members coming and going, all of whom care deeply about music, and seek a forum to share their insights, doubts, and discoveries. This is a transitory site of self-reflection, a collapsible tent of collaborative inquiry, where we dissect ideas with peers who probe them in a penetrating yet considerate way. We take measure of ourselves and our work, by thinking out loud before others of similar disposition, in a nurturing and supportive context. As its director, my job is to create the circumstances under which this experience can best occur for each of you in the most meaningful way, by carving out a common space for collegial convergence. But it's up to you, and all of us together, to fill this matrix with content and value.

The mission of the Institute is to voice our views, not on the arid pages of academic journals, or the sterile stages of conference ballrooms, but in the dynamic give and take of interactive workshops, an open air market of intellectual exchange, where good spirited haggling, half-baked truths, trial balloons, flash intuitions, and speculative rebuttals are all fair game. The Institute's a young idea, but with an old mentality. We affirm a venerable tradition of humanistic inquiry, premised on the rigorous testing of concepts through collegial interrogation, rooted in noble disciplines of independent thought, critical examination, and free-ranging discourse. We welcome dissent and debate, rather than the uniformity of consensus, or the

solipsism of insularity. We thrive upon curiosity, a healthy skepticism, and what Virginia Woolf calls the stimulus of contradiction.

Take a look around you. The people in this room are extraordinary. Collectively you embody the cutting edge of music aesthetics. Each of you brings a unique background and perspective, some special gift or characteristic to add to the common stock. All of you have been carefully vetted, drafted perhaps, to play a critical role in an operational network of scholars, coming together in order to think and work as one. From now until Sunday, we'll be in a state of constant hyper-interaction in close quarters. We'll form a clandestine band of musicological brothers and sisters, in a posture of monastic retreat, cloistered within the ivy walls of this historic seat of learning in the Windy City, the eminent home of Barack, Berthold, Blackhawks, Belushi, Beiderbecke, Bellow, Blagoyevich, Bugs Moran, Betty Ford—and Steve Rings.

The Institute represents a paradigm shift away from traditional modes of scholarship. Our job as theorists and musicologists is to *think* about music. But the actual *process* of thinking, our intuitions and embryonic conceptions, have little place in our professional conduct. The rich shadows of speculation are rarely cast in our finished products. We're not allowed to feel our way, hover on the borderland of truth, or wander in the maze of a probable argument. Conventional scholarly discourse is more orthodox—there's little room for doubt.

Here we apply a different aesthetic. We're not limited to unidirectional transfers of distilled information, but prefer a more symbiotic exchange, unscripted, face-to-face, like the lively barter of goods between feisty buyers and sellers in a street fair on the South Side. Ours is not a solitary endeavor. It's too easy, as someone said of Emerson, to be a sage in one's own study. Our trade is thought in process, the narrative of thinking, thinking in its unfolding, rather than the end products of thought. Our discoveries are imparted on the fly, as quickly as they arise, without waiting for incubation, codification, or publication. Like Socrates, we speak more from curiosity than certitude. We don't pretend to have the final word. We allow ourselves the luxury to browse, thumb through things, and as Martin nicely put it, paw at possibilities. We pass from one comment to another like food at a picnic, and try on ideas like a pair of new shoes. Like Charles Lamb's superannuated man, we walk about, not to and from. We grant ourselves the license to loiter, and the means to meander. We can test drive a theory, and look an assumption in the eye. And we get along just fine not reaching a conclusion. We ply the aesthetics of the unfinished.

Traditional conference papers, as you know, are prefabricated soliloquies. Solemnly delivered as portentous lectures from a lofty perch, elevated to eminence above silent spectators in an antiseptic chamber, the speaker claims, or at least pretends, that everything is perfectly clear, impeccably worked out long ago. As Hazlitt laments, we get upon stilts to tell our thoughts. Information is conveyed with a theatrical cadence and the tone of stage declamation. Conclusions are congealed into a narrative, its argument unassailable, purged of soggy patches, illicit inferences, and tenuous connections. In Lamb's words, we unload our cargo in perfect order.

Call me a dreamer, a gadfly, or merely nostalgic, but I prefer something a little more intimate—a coffee house or wooded tavern perhaps, maybe a country inn, some vestige of an earlier, simpler age. Like Rip Van Winkle, I long for what Washington Irving called “a perpetual

club of sages, philosophers, and other idle personages of the village.” I seek a more congenial court to serve and return the volley of playful disputation. I’d like to warm myself by a crackling fire, smoke a pipe, sip some brandy, and chew the fat with Dr. Johnson.

I journeyed to these distant shores of Lake Michigan, just like the rest of you, to imbibe aesthetical precepts and potations, and drink deeply of the wisdom of my peers. Yet I leave to you, harder students than myself, possessed of prodigious learning and more robust constitutions, to decipher their true worth. I myself have no valuable information to impart, no reasoned abstraction to expound or novel philosophy to preach. Far be it for me to venture an explanation of art. I lack too much the confidence of conviction, or the faith of any following. I embrace the mythology of no school or system. In fact, I have no religion at all—and *that* I firmly believe. I’m not in search of more facts to add to my personal collection. I have enough of them. What I need to know, and haven’t figured out, is what do they mean? It’s not detail I seek, but perspective.

My mind, as Addison confessed, is hungry for argument. Yet I have no case to plead, or special cause to prosecute. I simply wish to hear evidence proffered and pondered, controverted and weighed. I reserve, above all, the right to question everything, and everyone. I want to challenge relationships between things that appear compatible, and postulate connections between others that seem incompatible, yet suggest a more mysterious affinity. I hunt for the simplicity of true wisdom, and the *déjà vu* of recognition, as if I remembered something important, forgotten but known before.

Like Montaigne, I’m not afraid to express an opinion, even beyond my own knowledge, because it takes measure of me, rather than of the thing itself. Superior learning, yes, but better judgment I concede to none. On matters of discernment, I decline no duel. I’m interested more often in the form of a statement, its manner more than its meaning, and its presentation above its point. Oddities of speech intrigue me most. I dwell upon their cadence instead of content, and attend more for the sake of style, rather than the sake of substance. In plainer words, I’m Ciceronian. I’ll appreciate your rationale, but admire your rhythm, and analyze your rhetoric. I side skeptically with the Sophists, and plead guilty to a natural, though vexatious disposition, toward contrarianism. I hear cold, so say hot; you claim wet, I counter dry. Two-sided thinking. Janus faced. It’s pure reflex: I titrate all thoughts in the crucible of cross-examination. To quote Dante, whose words are better than mine, it pleases me as much to doubt as to know. In that sense, the Institute I suppose, is autobiographical. My idea of an agreeable person, like Disraeli, is someone who agrees with *me*, yet I’m addicted to adversariality. I hope it may be said of me that I have a just way of thinking, but I don’t change my mind too readily, since I find frailties on all sides. And I’m as doubtful of myself as I am of everything else.

Perhaps I’ve done a greater service by enlarging the experience of others such as you, than by any actual achievement of my own. Still, after ten years I can’t decide whether the benefit I’ve conferred is antiquarian or visionary. Is the Institute a glance back or a glimpse ahead, a recollection or a premonition? What I do know is that it’s something different, and evidently somewhat unique. I’m too modest to say its revolutionary, though others have for me.

The Institute’s defined by a negative dialectic, and specifically its antipathy to the conventions of academia, and the alienation, apathy, and anomie that it too often reflects. Our

vision is more intimate, our message more ethical, and our mission more political. It rejects the institutionalization of knowledge and the bureaucracy of scholarship that can dampen our spirit, cloud our camaraderie, and mask true learning.

We disavow, with Baudrillard, the simulacra of academia and its simulation of scholarship. We denounce, with Foucault, its fussiness and overregulation as internalized means of discipline and control. We decry, with Marx, the encroaching capitalization of thought, and the mass production of credentials. We're determined, with Nietzsche, to rattle cages of outmoded customs and conventions. And we shake a clenched fist at the Palinization of educational standards and professional protocols.

The Institute's an oasis in what Hazlitt calls the dry desert of learning. We stand for the proposition that it's the personal, not the public, that matters most. Our goal is to judge our thoughts, but affirm our selves as thinkers. We come to authenticate, validate, rejuvenate, and in some cases, resuscitate. We respond to ideas critically, but to one another positively. We seek above all to humanize our work and our community, and thereby reconnect with ourselves.

To invoke Deleuze for a minute, the Institute unfolds a smooth space of discourse, where thoughts and voices are free to come and go, in contrast to the striated and partitioned grid of higher education. The round configuration of our workshops replaces the traditional linear confrontation between speaker and audience with the interactive geometry of the circle, demoting a centralized perspective, and subordinating the point to the vector. Just as any coordinate within a circle can connect with any other, so may any person in our gathering traverse the diagonal to converse with another. There's no privileged position of place. Even in the curvature of our plenary semicircles, we are always in the midst of ourselves.

We strive not for the consistency of hierarchical order, but the rhizomatic equalization of a patchwork quilt, a decentered constellation, facilitating creative lines of flight between any of its constituents. The Institute's a mosaic, an intermezzo, short-term and close up. We here are musical nomads, Deleuze's intellectual warriors expressing, in a modest way, resistance to the miniature state society of institutionalized learning, by declaring and occupying a free and deterritorialized scholarly plateau.

So here's what I propose. Let's shed our professional armor and leave our weapons and credentials at the door. Let's introduce ourselves as people, trust each other, and learn from each other. Let's roll up our sleeves, toss some ideas around, have a wastebasket handy, and not mind using it. Let's not get ruffled by being questioned or challenged, or try to impress each other, or pretend we're always right. Let's forget about ranks and resumes and just be us. The one quality we need is what Virginia Woolf calls, sincerity of the mind. And the only thing you should hesitate about, is being hesitant.

Now there're only four ground rules at the Institute. The first is that everyone's expected to pitch in. You can take a little time to get your juices flowing, but please don't sit back for four days and soak up other people's juice like a sponge. Our workshop leaders are facilitators and catalysts, but every single one of you is asked to contribute. The modality of this event is not private enrichment, but social engagement. Polyvocality. We each share the collective responsibility to talk and teach, as well as to listen and learn. So if you came to Chicago hoping

to fly under the radar, either because you're nervous, shy, uncomfortable, unprepared, unacquainted, paranoid, schizophrenic, suicidal, or whatever else may be holding you back from jumping into the fray, kindly leave that strategy at the door. Put on an apron, come on into the kitchen, pick up a spoon, and start stirring the pot like the rest of us. There's some cookin' to be done here, and that's why you're invited to the party.

The second rule is that any idea is fair game for interrogation. Nothing's immune from scrutiny or evaluation. So please don't be so ideologically devoted to some sacred cow, even one you've nurtured from a calf, that you're unwilling to have it appraised at current market value. Let's not be so enamored with a thought that we can no longer think. We're not clergy preaching gospel, but inquisitors after truth.

The third rule is that any idea can be tossed into the mix. The Institute works through the cumulative effect of conversation. Its dynamic potential and our best ideas are discovered through an incremental process of trial and error, by thinking and reacting to each other out loud. The premise is Kleist's, who posited the gradual fabrication of thoughts while speaking, contending that speech itself can create ideas rather than the other way around. If some beliefs are censored, we're less likely to generate much that's new. We may not find the philosopher's stone, but we can hit upon some new discoveries in pursuing it. So let's stick with the 1st Amendment. Short of crying fire, anything goes.

The last rule engages an ethical standard of sensitivity in all our proceedings, reflecting the collaborative spirit of the Institute itself. Creative communication requires a degree of debate, dialogue, and the agonistic airing of differences. But we must always do this in a mutually respectful way. We uphold a golden rule of discourse, a micro-politics of interaction, that fosters a we-perspective rather than an I-perspective. So doubt wisely, but let's be mindful of one another, and of the group itself. As this process gradually evolves, we'll merge into an integrated cognitive whole, a single mind with multiple voices, what Habermas calls a discursive democracy thinking as one.

Now if your guts are as functional as your brains, when flashes of illumination come, insights of mind will be accompanied by intuitions of the heart. Conceptual light bulbs will shine against a deeper, yet more elusive sense of authentic interpersonal exchange, a feeling of engaging in a genuine human event, fulfilling our longing not just for information, but connection. These are rare peak moments to lie in wait for. It might occur just once, if at all, when you aren't speaking, in a posture of listening and witnessing.

If you're lucky and receptive, you may suddenly feel a quiet presence, an aura of intimacy descending upon the room like a ray of light—Rembrandt's beam—lifting life out of the ordinary. If you'll permit metaphysics, this is our collective spirit, the ineffable apparition of our sharing something together in our mutual co-presence. Be vigilant of that special moment of sublimity. It will only last a few seconds. I feel it myself, every single year, but have never told a soul. This is the most delicate flower of the Institute, its aesthetic epiphany, and its sweetest reward.

What is the Mannes Institute? It's both a physical place and a conceptual space. It's a nursery for reflection, a theatre of interaction, where we think aloud and build camaraderie in a

deeper and more meaningful way. It's a musical think tank, a utopian community of continuing professional education, exchanging the narrative of monologue for the spontaneous give and take of dialogue, and replacing the unidirectional conveyance of distilled information for the multi-directional flow of multifarious ideas in a shared and symmetrical space. The Institute's an activity of imagination and a test of our trust in one another. It's an exercise in intellectual fellowship and collegial companionship. It's an experiment in character and culture, our own Sleepy Hollow, set off in time and space, a perpetual club of sages, philosophers, and other idle personages of our musical village.

Now here's the caveat: the task before us is rigorous. The Institute is not a stroll in Hyde Park. As you've probably gathered, it's hard work, so buckle up. I'm summoning each of you, like Captain Ahab, to be on deck, front and center, body and soul, at all our events, both professional and social. Be here and be on time. No skipping allowed. Once this is over, you'll carry away a backpack of ideas, but more importantly, an indelible memory of intellectual intoxication and personal achievement. You'll have the satisfaction of accomplishing something demanding yet worthwhile, and of having done it with colleagues close by your side. You'll earn your badges, your pins, and your discharge diplomas—and be proud of them.

At the end, you may hold old doubts about new things, and discover new doubts about old things. You may even feel something has failed us, that together we have fallen short, our mission incomplete, or too much just beginning. Yet if we falter, the size of our attempt is largely to blame. And that, I imagine, is just right. The best we can do on this plateau is to point and inspire. Crossing into Jordan is left for each of us in our own way. As the Talmud instructs, study together, but reflect alone. All true scholarship, says Samuel Johnson, is ultimately the production of an individual mind owing nothing to our colleagues but the contagion of diligence. We may derive thoughts from others, but our way of thinking, the mold in which our thoughts are cast, must always be our own.

Many wonderful qualities are to be found in our profession: intellectual stimulation, tenured positions, leisurely sabbaticals, and academic awards. But connection—true connection—this alone is rare. It can only occur experientially, in life—*Erleben*—not on some printed page. Authentic connection's an embodied experience that claims us as whole people, not just as minds. And connecting can only occur in time, and time I'm learning is precious. As some ancient author observed, years are few; books are many.

So let's be frank with ourselves without being overdramatic. These next four days are as much about us, about you and me, as they are about our ideas of this, that, or some other thing. This isn't just a think tank, but a live encounter that engages more than our brains, but our being as well. It's an existential snapshot of who we are, and what we might become. This has as much to do with our own anthropology, the aesthetics of ourselves, as it does with our love of music, of knowledge, and of beauty itself.

Welcome to Goodspeed, our port of debarkation. You've pilgrimed from afar, bearing the fruits of formidable research, and stand now on the pier about to board. As your Ahab turning ship's command over to Queequeg and Starbuck, a.k.a. Hoeckner and Rehding, I summon each of you, as Ishmaels, to unfurl your sails, gather our breeze, and leave this slavish shore for the open independence of the sea. Grasp the greater vision of our voyage, seize the moment, and

magnify its meaning. Embrace the aesthetics of the Institute itself, our Pequod, and come together as its noble crew. For these next few days on the shores of Lake Michigan, let's rally round the mast and yoke ourselves more closely to each other, coupled in collegiality, so we may think and feel as one. Only then can we reemerge, each of us reborn, through the fertile conception of a genuine meeting of the minds.

In this great American university, in this great American town, I'll close by invoking Ahab's challenge in the great American novel:

I set ye a task. Take these harpoons and lances. Melt them down. Forge me new weapons that will strike deep and hold fast. But do not douse them in water; they must have a proper baptism. What say ye, all ye souls? Will you give as much blood as shall be needed to temper the steel?

Now cast ye off, and catch that whale.

THE MILES LEVIN ESSAY AWARD

Each year the Mannes Institute grants an award for an outstanding essay on the topic of the Institute, called the Miles Levin Musical Essay Award. This award is given in honor of Wayne's nephew, Miles Alpern Levin, an extraordinary young man and brilliant essayist whose life was tragically cut short. Wayne has two daughters, and was very close to Miles as though he were his son. Miles was diagnosed died in 2005 at the age of 17 with an extremely a rare pediatric muscle cancer affecting only 350 children a year. The chances of getting this disease are incredibly remote. He died in 2007 a few days before his 19th birthday.

In the two years of his illness, Miles miraculously evolved from a typical teenager to achieve national fame by creating an internet blog that was read by tens of thousands of people all around the world. He described his confrontation with death and his savoring every moment of life with of courage, humor, sensitivity, and grace. He developed an astonishing level of wisdom and insight far beyond his years, and became an inspirational public figure. Miles' story was covered in the news media, both in print and on national television. He was interviewed by Anderson Cooper on CNN and Bob Woodruff on ABC. Woodruff, who had suffered injuries in Iraq, became a close personal friend and admirer, and attributed in part his own recovery to the inspiration he received from Miles.

Miles was the recipient of numerous awards and citations, including the prestigious National Sarcoma Foundation Leadership and Courage Award as its youngest recipient. 15,000 people responded to his blog each month from around the world, including Asia, Europe, and South America, from parents struggling with a child's illness or death, other kids facing death, and healthy admirers. He helping people overcome addiction and depression, and people on the brink of suicide. He gave inspirational strength to numerous patients in hospitals.

Miles was a keen observer of the most minute aspects of reality and evolved into a brilliant writer with wit, charm, and erudition. His wisdom, charisma, and depth of character evolved and intensified as his illness progressed. In the final years of his life, he created paintings, sculptures, and even began composing. A central theme of his writing was that the confrontation with death and adversity could be seized as challenge to expand your heart and mind. On the day of his death, that there were several million hits on his website. Here is a

sample of Miles' writing and thought, remarkably coming from the mind of an eighteen year old, in a way, perhaps, that might invoke Larry's notion of numinous particles of meaning:

Certain things in this world sing to us a sublime wake up call. We're constantly searching for them, something real to hold onto and give us the feeling that our lives count for something worthwhile. Whatever this means to us personally, we should not limit where we may expect to find significance or what form it may take. These special experiences, notions, relationships, and phenomena are what we feel as the profound. And when we find it, we know because we can say, now this—this is life.

The goal of the Miles Levin Essay Award is to honor creativity in musical prose and encourage music scholars to write in a manner Miles himself cultivated, a more informal, personal, embodied, and readable style. The essay may relate to the theme of the Institute in any way. It may be metaphorical, philosophical, poetic, humorous, playful, ironic, historical, critical, and/or personal, and must above all engage readers and listeners in a compelling, entertaining, thoughtful, intuitive, sensitive, and provoking manner. This award is *not* for a scholarly or analytical article similar to those appearing in a professional journal, or even a paper read at a typical academic conference. The style is more literary than academic, more subjective than objective, more observational than informational. It should be nontechnical, conversational, and creative, with an emphasis on wit and imagination, charm and humor, insight and sincerity, sophistication and erudition, oratorical flair, and the belletristic quality of the prose itself.

The Institute is privileged to give the Miles Levin Essay Award to two winners this year, Emily Dolan of the University of Pennsylvania for her essay "The Aesthetic Phoenix," and Nina Sun Eidsheim of the University of California, Los Angeles, for her essay "On Haikus, Research, Underwater Singing and Listening."

CLOSING TALK

I stand before you for the last time, members of this august community of scholars, dedicated to, and now utterly exhausted from, our own mutual enlightenment. As keeper of the flame, about to douse it to end this Olympic event, permit me to ruminate on the hazy origins of our noble enterprise. The truth is, virtually every educational encounter I've had, other than this of my own fabrication, was premised upon a vast structural chasm between teacher and student. One talks, the other listens. You don't need to be Foucault, let alone French, to decipher that inequality.

Given this historical ubiquity of hierarchical learning, is there some ancient precedent for our egalitarian yet paradoxically elite convocation? I mentioned at the outset Rip Van Winkle's perpetual club of sages, philosophers, and other idle personages of Sleepy Hollow. So I ask, has some legend like this ever existed in music before?

Perhaps the best-known study group in music history was the Florentine Camerata, convening in the castle of Giovanni de Bardi in the late 16th century. Giulio Caccini, one of its distinguished members, reports that the discussion group—let me upgrade it to "workshop"—explored a number of topics, including music, poetry, art, and astrology. The Camerata, as we all know, played a decisive role in articulating the aesthetic principles culminating in the birth of opera.

Bardi's Camerata, however, was just one star in a galaxy of others, flickering across the skies of Renaissance Europe. The revival of classical learning stimulated a general interest in the idea of learning itself. Plato's ancient Academy, named after the mythological hero, Academus, was the classical prototype for over 200 scholarly societies in Italy alone. At the core of this movement was the belief that the very act of discussing artistic matters, i.e. *estetica*, imparted the elevating moral and curative effects of antiquity. 500 years ago, folks like us gathered to discover the legendary benefits of aesthetic inquiry through collaborative discourse and communal debate.

The pioneer in this revival of classical scholarly communities was Marsilio Ficino, a musician who established the first such society, the *Académia Platonica* or Platonic Academy around 1470. Supported by the Médicis, this Greekish gathering included the most illustrious scholars, musicians, and literati of the day. Similar groups imitated Ficino's institute on the Italian peninsula and elsewhere, each sporting a hefty manifesto of intellectual objectives and philosophical premises, replete with rigorous criteria for admission and disciplined standards of conduct.

By the 16th century, the concept of an egalitarian body of elite scholars privately convening for the purpose of interactive education was firmly established. These institutes existed entirely apart from the formal hierarchical tradition of the university. Among them were the Academy of Doménico Veniér in Venice, the *Académia de la Crusca* in Florence, the Vittoria in Verona, the Floridi in Bologna, and the Arcadia in Roma. Competing for the most prominent and learned members—no women of course allowed—these collegial bodies convened on a regular basis to dissect and discuss the aesthetics of music and other objects of communal inquiry.

The Camerata wasn't the only such think tank to alter the course of music history. Veniér's institute promoted Bembo's theories of vernacular literature, influencing the development of the madrigal. The *Académia de la Fama* in Venice played a significant role in the publication of Zarlino's treatise, perhaps as his price of admission into the society itself, bestowing instant prestige and readership among the Venetian intellectual elite.

Some of these secret societies had more colorful names creating an enchanting kaleidoscope of intellectual vitality, laying the foundation for our own Chicago Camerata. There was, for example, the harmoniously consonant Academy of Unison in Perugia, the lofty Academy of Elevati or Elevated Ones in Florence, the mysterious *Academia de Incogniti* in Venice, and the romantic Academy of Infatuated Ones in Naples.

My personal favorite, a distant forefather of our own clandestine consortium, was the ancient Academy of Alterati, or Altered Ones convening in 16th-century Florence. Key members of the Camerata, including Corsi, Mei, Doni, Rinuccini, and even Bardi himself were also Alterati on the sly. In his manifesto of the Alterati's objectives, read before each of their meetings, its maniacal founder, Giulio del Bene, proclaimed its goal as their "alteration" or transformation into changed collegial beings—*Alterati*—enlightened through the collective pursuit of knowledge.

Their symbol was a vat for pressing wine heaped with grapes, representing the

transformative and distilling power of an idea. In pursuit of this aim, the Altered Ones guzzled the intoxicating wine of collaborative thought. Misdemeanors of tardiness and absence were reprimanded by the obligation to deliver an extemporaneous dissertation on some thorny topic of collective concern. Issues of inquiry were invariably ambitious, although the question of sex as a suitable subject of discourse was routinely contested without consummation.

There were luminous discourses of a most numinous nature, prickly debates on the meaning of meaning and the absence of presence, exotic Asiatic experiments in underwater singing and ritual burials of the beautiful. There were even mystical invocations of the Mona Lisa herself, peppered with periodic reports of African sports, all supplemented by needlessly lavish meals, funded through dubious financial transactions that culminated in the eventual imprisonment of its director.

Music was a paramount focus of collective enlightenment, though like our own congregation, professional musicians were entirely absent, as well as the slightest trace of any actual music-making itself. In fact, it was out of pent up desire to hear some [quote] “real music” that Bardi and brethren skipped out of these tediously abstract seminars to hang out at the local Camerata.

The best thing about the Alterati, however, was that everyone had a nickname or pseudonym—something we’ve mercifully decided to suspend in our own proceedings. Bardi, for instance, was called *il Puro*, or the Pure One, *Girólamo Mei* was *il Pianigiáno* or the Steady One, *Rinuccíni* was known as the Bold One, and *del Bene* himself was known as the Desirous One.

But my favorite were those members whose real appellations are no longer known, the boys in the back, Derrida’s forgotten others, tagging along in the back row of history, guys like the Tender One, the Silent One, the Dismembered One, even the Horrid One. And finally, as apparently in all academia, both now, then, and no doubt back to antiquity as well, there was—as there are here—the Late One, the Dubious One, and best of all, the Drowsy One. That would be me.

FACULTY

Berthold Hoeckner (co-chair)
Alex Rehding (co-chair)
Daniel Chua
Fred Maus
Susan McClary
Steve Rings
Martin Scherzinger
Larry Kramer (guest)

MEMBERS

Brent Auerbach
Amy Bauer
Karl Braunschweig

Seth Brodsky
James Buhler
Federico Celestini
Keith Chapin
Suzannah Clark
James Currie
Emily Dolan
Eric Drott
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Charles Fisk
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Brian Hyer
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Marianne Kielian-Gilbert
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Charles Kronengold
Sherry Lee
Su Yin Mak
Nathan Martin
Vera Micznik
Seth Monahan
Maryam Moshaver
Catharine Nolan
Michael Puri
Sarah Reinhardt
Jan Sprick
Benjamin Steege
Paul Steinbeck
Naomi Walthan-Smith
Holly Watkins
Felix Woerner
Marcus Zagorski