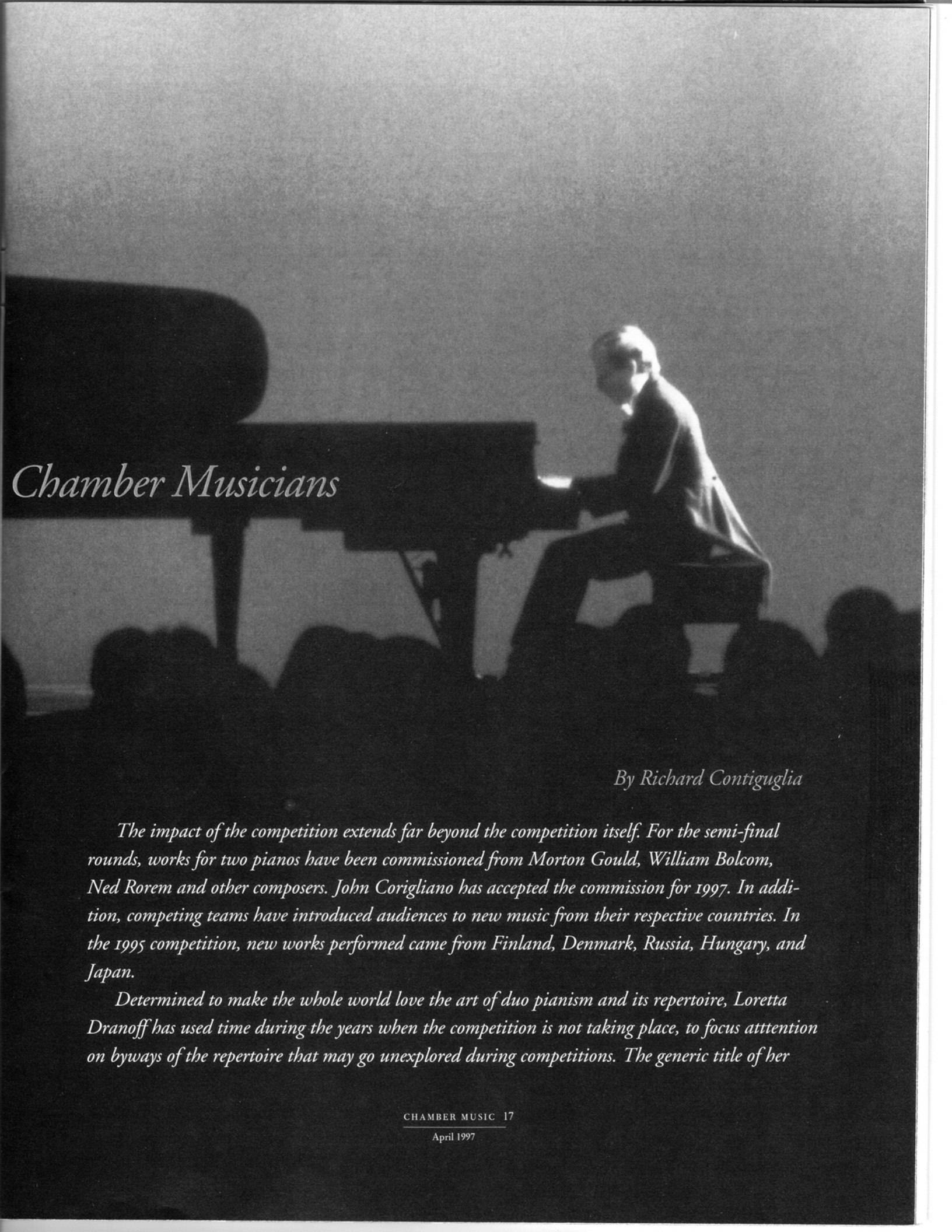




*Duo Pianists as*

***D**uo-pianism, the art of two pianists performing together at one or two pianos, is generating interest throughout the world that is unprecedented in recent history. Meanwhile, chamber music programs are coming to embrace an ever-widening notion of what constitutes chamber music. Having spent the past thirty-four years of my life as half of the Richard and John Contiguglia piano duo, I feel that the time seems appropriate to reconsider the status of duo pianists as chamber musicians.*

*Since 1987 the biennial Murray Dranoff International Two Piano Competition has taken place in Miami, attracting hundreds of duos from all over the world. The driving force behind the competition is Dranoff's widow and former duo partner, Loretta Dranoff, the de facto godmother to virtually every team that has ever competed.*



## *Chamber Musicians*

*By Richard Contiguglia*

*The impact of the competition extends far beyond the competition itself. For the semi-final rounds, works for two pianos have been commissioned from Morton Gould, William Bolcom, Ned Rorem and other composers. John Corigliano has accepted the commission for 1997. In addition, competing teams have introduced audiences to new music from their respective countries. In the 1995 competition, new works performed came from Finland, Denmark, Russia, Hungary, and Japan.*

*Determined to make the whole world love the art of duo pianism and its repertoire, Loretta Dranoff has used time during the years when the competition is not taking place, to focus attention on byways of the repertoire that may go unexplored during competitions. The generic title of her*

three-day symposium "Two Pianos Plus" signals that a great deal may be added to the two-piano formula—an orchestra, percussion, singers, a string quartet, even a third or fourth piano. But there is always a place for two pianos alone—or even one piano, four hands—on the eclectic programs, should the music be sufficiently obscure or simply deserving of a hearing. The 1994 symposium honored Morton Gould and featured his important *Dance Variations for Two Pianos and Orchestra*. The 1996 symposium introduced audiences to Dinu Lipatti's *Three Romanian Dances for Two Pianos* and his *Concerto for Two Pianos and String Orchestra*.

And for the first time in its long history of helping build young artists' careers, Young Concert Artists, Inc. opened its auditions in 1996 to duos performing music for one piano, four hands.

Last summer the annual Quebec International Duo-Piano Festival was launched. This extraordinary event takes place at a former monastery nestled in a pine forest on the banks of the St. Lawrence River in the community of Contrecoeur and at the *Enfant-Jésus Church* in nearby Tracy, about an hour's drive northeast of Montreal. The festival is the brainchild of Dominique Morel and Douglas Nemish, Canada's foremost duo-piano team and the winners of the 1987 Murray Dranoff Competition. The festival's objective is to bring together two-piano teams to meet in a noncompetitive atmosphere, to exchange ideas, to perform for one another, and to perfect their skills under the guidance of masters of the duo art. The festival attracts pianists from around the world.

At the festival, Discovery Concerts showcase the best new duos in a variety of repertoire, from Mozart to the avant-garde. Gala Concerts take place at the *Enfant-Jésus Church* before full houses. Last summer one featured my brother and me, Richard and John Contiguglia,

in an evening of Schubert duets. The other concert was a marathon event including five professional duos in a program of twentieth-century music ranging from Debussy and Ravel to Percy Grainger, Stravinsky, Hindemith, and William Bolcom. The rest of the festival consists of daily masterclasses and lecture-demonstrations.

Much evidence points to the emergence of growing numbers of piano duos worldwide, the success of piano-duo competitions and festivals, and renewed interest among composers in writing music for two pianists. That said, the market for chamber music seems generally to have been unaffected. Do presenters and managers still harbor doubts about the chamber music character of any music written for two pianists?

If the string quartet is the "purest and highest revelation of chamber music and perhaps of all music," as the British musicologist Donald Francis Tovey suggested, then perhaps no better definition of chamber music exists than music that aspires to the style of the string quartet, a combination of homogeneous-toned instruments whose wide range and self-sufficiency of parts make possible the development of the finely articulated, multilayered, often polyphonic texture that most people recognize as the chamber music style.

It would be difficult to think of any combination of performers other than the string quintet and sextet, that more closely resembles this string quartet ideal than that of two pianists playing together at one or two pianos. The range of the keyboard actually exceeds that of the string quartet, and the technical advantages of four hands and twenty fingers often provide opportunities for texture of more than four parts. It is no accident that the development of the string quartet, at least from Mozart through Schubert, paralleled the development of the piano duet. Such piano duets as Mozart's *Sonata in F (KV497)*,

*Sonata in C (KV521)*, and his *Variations in G (KV501)*, and virtually all of Schubert's seventy or so compositions for piano, four hands, can be properly understood only in the company of both composers' music for string quartet and string quintet.

The relation between the Schubert piano duets and his string quartets (and quintet) was an important topic of discussion at the Quebec festival. My brother and I drew attention to the complex contrapuntal texture that informs both bodies of music. Some of the duets display a virtuosity of contrapuntal technique that exceeds anything in the string works. While the latter contain many examples of canons and two-part invertible counterpoint, the *Allegro ("Lebensstürme")* and the *Fantasy in F Minor* contain passages of four-part invertible counterpoint, and, in the case of the *Fantasy*, four-part invertible counterpoint in the context of a double fugue. The piano duets and the string quartets (and quintet) inhabit the same musical world. In essence, if Schubert's string quartets are chamber music, then so are his piano duets. Jean-Eudes Vaillancourt, professor of piano at the University of Montreal and teacher of hundreds of piano duos, made the point more categorically: "The four-hand music of Schubert is perfect. It is a string quartet." Dominique Morel compared the texture of a Schubert duet to "a material in which one sees all the fibers." Her image recalls Tovey's remark that in chamber music "every note is meant to be heard."

If the sheer number of Schubert's piano duets commands respect, their importance invites awe. Joseph Horowitz, artistic adviser to "Schubertiade-1993: Schubert and the Piano" at New York's 92nd Street Y, wrote that "Schubert's most original contribution as a keyboard composer may be his prodigious catalogue of piano duets—arguably, the

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most comprehensively varied body of music ever created by a single composer in a single genre." They include Schubert's longest piano sonata, his Grand Duo; his most important set of variations, Variations in A-flat on an Original Theme; his most formally innovative work and one of his most tragic, the Fantasy in F Minor, a work whose exploration of cyclic structure probably served as a model for Liszt's Sonata in B Minor; his third-longest essay in sonata form, Allegro ("Lebensstürme"), bested only by the first movements of the Symphony in C ("The Great") and the Piano Trio in E-flat; and his greatest and most far-ranging treatment of the Hungarian idiom, "Divertissement à la Hongroise."

Much of the best two-piano music, like string quartets and Schubert duets, is richly textured and often contrapuntal. These qualities alone recommend it, too, to the canon of true chamber music. And much successful two-piano music depends on a conversational exchange between the two performers, an antiphonal effect fully realized only in a "chamber." The list of undeniably chamber-music compositions for two pianos is long and distinguished. It includes Bach's three keyboard concertos, Mozart's Sonata in D (KV448), and his Fugue in C Minor (KV 426); Schumann's Andante and Variations, Op. 46 and his Etudes in Canon Form, Op. 56; Brahms' Variations on a Theme of Haydn, Op. 56b and the Sonata ("nach dem Quintett"), Op. 34bis; Saint-Saens' Variations on a Theme of Beethoven, Op. 35, Debussy's "En Blanc et Noir," Poulenc's Sonata (1953), Stravinsky's Concerto for Two Solo Pianos and his Sonata; Hindemith's Sonata (1941); Bartok's Suite, Op. 4b, "Seven Pieces from Mikrokosms," and his Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, which incidentally, the composer thought first of calling a quartet for two pianists and two percussionists; Oliver Messiaen's "Visions de l'Amen;" and George Crumb's "Music for a Summer Evening (Macrocosmos III)."

Even a work such as Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, transcribed for two pianos by Franz Liszt, seems most at home in a chamber-music venue. Stripped of its orchestral and vocal color, Beethoven's masterpiece reveals details of its contrapuntal texture that often suggest the part-writing of his string quartets. This movement from orchestra hall to chamber effected by Liszt, is the exact opposite of what Samuel Barber wrought when he transcribed the slow movement of his String Quartet, Op. 11, for string orchestra, calling the transcription Adagio for Strings.

The likelihood of hearing any of this large and important repertoire for two pianists on chamber music series ultimately depends on educating presenters and audiences. What they learn to value, they will want to hear.

One of the most successful chamber music presenters in the country, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in New York City, has always made a place for piano, four-hand, and two-piano music. Charles Wadsworth, its artistic director from 1966 to 1989, told me that one of the secrets of the success of his sold-out chamber music programs was their variety. He said, "Presenters around the country can excite audiences by giving them an opportunity to hear this neglected repertoire."

Some artist managers and artist representatives report that piano duos are in less demand than string groups, which may explain why duo piano teams seldom appear on their rosters. (The exceptions to this that I spoke to are Mariëdi Anders, who manages Anthony and Joseph Pastore; International Artists Group, which represents Ralph Markham and Kenneth Broadway; Joanne Rile Artists Management, Inc., which has just taken on Nettle and Markham; and Genevieve Spielberg, Inc., which represents my brother and me.)

Presenters tell me that in booking decisions, repertoire is a major factor for them. So I have to assume that they are not aware that, for example, Schubert wrote vastly more chamber music for piano, four-hands than for piano trio, string quartet, string quintet, and piano quintet combined. Most plan to feature Schubert's chamber music during 1997, the year marking the 200th anniversary of the composer's death. Not one series, however, will include a program of Schubert's piano duets!

I hope that, with greater public awareness of the genre, duos may yet regain the status that they once possessed. Recall that Alfred Einstein called Mozart's Sonata for Two Piano's (KV448) "one of the most profound and most mature of all Mozart's compositions." And Schumann considered Schubert's Rondeau in A Major for piano, four-hands, "one of Schubert's finest works." ■

*Richard and John Contiguglia have been performing around the world as a piano duo for thirty-four years.*