

Hutchins Consort Feature Story February 1, 2009

By: Drew Cady

Hutchins Consort plays way into modern string history

American Luthier, Dr. Carleen Hutchins, has dedicated her life to advancing our knowledge about the science behind the creation of string instruments. She designed and built the unique octet of instruments which Southern California string ensemble, Hutchins Consort perform on. Dr. Hutchins (who is the namesake of the Consort) was awarded the prestigious Honorary Fellowship from the Acoustical Society of America (only one of seventeen recipients ever, and Thomas Alva Edison was the first) for her outstanding work in the field of violin acoustics. Surrounding herself with a team of Scientists, she researched and developed a theory for building a harmonically matched and tonally scaled octet of instruments (of all sizes) with the characteristic clarity, brilliance, evenness, and power of the violin. Since then the Hutchins Consort and its predecessor groups have built a repertoire of arrangements and compositions which offer a new dimension to the artistry in string performance, and define one of the single most important modern developments in the technology behind violin building.

Since their inception in 2000, Hutchins Consort Artistic Director, Joe McNalley, has spent the last eight years, refining the sound of this string group, inviting a dazzling array of gifted musicians to play in the ensemble, and with resident composer, Fred Charlton, building an eclectic repertoire of musical selections to showcase the amazing sounds of these instruments. As Joe says, "it really sounds like one giant instrument, since the violins are all matched to one another, and create a sonority of sounds that are even and vibrant throughout the eight octave range

which they span". Charlton, who has refined his talents as a composer these last twenty years, has written many wonderful works for the octet, each of which deliver the audience into the unique realm of sound, where themes and rhythmic patterns seem to move effortlessly from instrument to instrument. And yet, with the informed, individual passions of each player, their collective efforts are full of varied colors and sounds.

Another aspect of the ensemble's focus is collaboration and proliferation of their music across many genre lines. All members of the octet improvise and when the opportunity presents, play new, innovative interpretations upon a score. The group regularly collaborates with other musicians of diverse backgrounds. Recently, they have presented programs with a modern jazz drummer, an Iraqi Oud player, a duo of Hawaiian music masters, and three classically trained tenors. Each of these programs allows the Hutchins Consort the opportunity to further expand their realm of art, and to experiment freely in creating a modern new interpretation of so many traditional music forms.

The Hutchins Consort's next program will be a celebration of International Women's Day, and will offer a program of women composers through history. Joining them on this program will be visual artist, Nori Green, who will unveil her new painting of American Luthier, Dr. Carleen Hutchins. Hutchins, who is 98 years old, and lives in Wolfeboro, New Hampshire, has recently given her support to a merge of the Hutchins Consort with her organization, The New Violin Family Association. This merge will allow the Hutchins Consort to carry on the educational work of this east coast organization, and Dr. Carleen Hutchins. Dr.

Hutchins originally founded NVFA to proliferate the performance upon these unique instruments, and to further educate the world about the scientific discoveries which lead to the design and build of this remarkable set of matched string instruments. For more information about The Hutchins Consort, and their upcoming performances, please visit their website at: www.hutchinsconsort.org