



ANA charmed her 6-stringed, fretted Red Viper.

innova in New York City

Between May 17 and 31, 2011, **ACF's innova record label** presented a showcase of some of their artists at composer John Zorn's venue, The Stone, in New York's Lower East Side. Two dozen performers presented what was effectively a 24-hour marathon conveniently spread over two weeks. Artists came from nearby New York boroughs and as far afield as Boston, Florida, Colorado Springs, and St. Paul, with each evening pairing composer/performers around a common theme such as laptops, violins, quartets, etc.

The series received coverage in *The New Yorker*, *Village Voice*, and *Time Out*. *The New York Times* published two reviews on May 27 and June 1, 2011, and described *innova* as "a hardy independent record label," "enterprising, polyglot," and "admirably broad-minded." See display ads on pages 6 and 7 for some of the *innova* CDs featuring artists who performed at The Stone.

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Denman Maroney reached parts that other hyper-pianists can barely reach while Theo Bleckmann sings Maroney's W.B. Yeats songs.



Psychoangelo (Glen Whitehead and Michael Theodore), all the way from Colorado, brought their trumpet, saw, and laptop stylings to the big city.



Ken Field's Revolutionary Snake Ensemble filled The Stone with their second-line funk.

Photos: Philip Blackburn

Access to Music by Elizabeth Wolff

I'm a pianist, and I'd like to introduce my **Access To Music** (ATM) project to the other ACF members and *Sounding Board* readers. Who knows? Perhaps you will want to get involved, or organize a similar project on your own.

ATM really began with a required doctoral course I took in 1997 at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY). For that course, we were supposed to choose, discuss, and perform a new work for piano. Just prior to that class, I had heard a colleague rehearse John Corigliano's "Etude Fantasy" (1976) in the presence of the composer. I was simply overwhelmed, not only by the performance, but by the power, intelligence, and breadth in Corigliano's writing for the piano and his brilliant command of craft. Right then and there I decided to stop being a 19th century stick-in-the-mud when it came to piano repertory. I voraciously learned and performed that same Corigliano work for my doctoral course requirement. Although at the time I never gave Corigliano's "Etude Fantasy" the fine-tuning it deserved, the experience made me zealous to search out and learn more recently-composed new piano works like it.

I didn't know it at the time, but the seeds of the project I eventually came to call *Access To Music* began to germinate.

Even before taking the CUNY course, I had become acutely aware that while conservatory training continued to provide great preparation to young soloists, there usually was a huge gap in their repertoire choices, which seemed limited to the first 20 years of the 20th century. This "great divide" between what they played and what had been composed more recently was perhaps due to expediency: these early "classics" of the 20th century were simply more familiar, and thus easy and safe choices for required semester exams, competitions and auditions. But this attitude could — and often does — harden into a life-long habit: a lack of curiosity and an unwillingness to explore, creating a repertoire gap for pianists, who rarely cross that "great divide" and make the effort to search out more recently-composed works for possible performance.

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So I asked myself: why not encourage pianists to give concerts in homes with good pianos – but with the stipulation that they feature a promising local emerging composer whose interest in the piano is strong and ongoing?

After living and working in New York City for many years, I settled in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis-St. Paul, where I have an especially loyal former student who, along with his own dependable friends, were all intrigued by my idea. In discussions with them, we developed what we hoped would be a viable and workable format for an ongoing concert series we dubbed *Access to Music*.

Each concert would be held in a private home, thus eliminating the pressure of trying to fill a hall and the need to pay rental fees. So that we could establish ourselves as a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization, we approached the American Composers Forum and asked them to serve as our Fiscal Agent.

The basic format for each concert was a program that would include a recent work by a local composer. At the subsequent, follow-up concert — in another urban setting — this same work would be included along with a selected work by the next city's resident composer.

Thus, at each ATM concert, the new composition from the previous concert is performed again, and is paired with the work by a composer residing in the next city chosen for the concert series. This “round-robin” format gives every composer double exposure. For the performers, the excitement comes from unearthing and learning new repertoire, performing the new works in two settings, and of course, simply getting to know who is “out there”— what emerging composers are writing for piano, and helping them build both a local audience as well as establishing a reputation outside their local environs. Most emerging composers, I have found, are eager for just this kind of exposure.

ATM's first recital was held in a St. Paul home in October of 2005. Since then, we have performed in Tucson, Los Angeles, and Denver. Plans are being made for the 5th ATM concert to be held in Washington, D.C. for which we are currently seeking scores.

Access To Music is not just limited to private house concerts, however. In fact, it's possible that its most important component is that the follow-up concert takes place at more public local venues atypical for “new music audiences.” These performances can occur at rehabilitation centers, senior centers, prisons, family shelters, psychiatric facilities, or nursing homes. The idea is that the second presentations should not only give the new works another local hearing, but also introduce the very concept of productivity, purpose, and creative thinking to those who quite possibly have had little or no contact with “new music.” Presenting both classical and contemporary music to young and old alike in a wide variety of non-traditional venues accesses music's enormous emotional power to new ears, hearts, and minds.

To date, the selected works and their composers are: “Januaries” by David Evan Thomas; “Why (?) Jacob” by Dan Asia; “Snapshots” by Peter Knell; and “Cold Light” by Chris Malloy. I plan to record these as well as other compositions generated from future ATM concerts for release on a commercial CD.

At the moment, I am ATM's sole participating pianist, but it is my hope that in time — and with exposure — additional funding can be secured for more pianists to join me on this treasure hunt for new composers, repertoire and audiences.



Elizabeth Wolff is a graduate of The Juilliard School, a recipient of the Pro Musicis International Award, Founder and Artistic Director of Music at Lake Willoughby, and recipient of a Jerome Foundation Recording Grant.



Composers on the ATM Project

“I was pleased to be one of the composers chosen by Elizabeth Wolff for Access to Music in the Twin Cities in 2005, and was surprised that Liz chose my fantasy, “Januaries,” rather than a shorter, fluffier piece. That elliptical work rubbed shoulders on the program with intermezzos by Brahms and the last Beethoven sonata, gaining luster by association. Liz can play softer than any pianist I’ve ever heard, and in a home setting the audience was able to appreciate her nuances up close. ‘I could hear the Montana landscape,’ one woman told me. Liz Wolff is a powerful and expressive pianist as well as a subtle musician, so hearing her musical mind engaged in ones music is a privilege and a pleasure.”



— David Evan Thomas



“Liz had put a great deal of thought into my piece, and she played it beautifully. Many in the audience were from outside the usual contemporary music crowd. Liz bowled them over. They were every bit as receptive to the delightfully witty music of Peter Knell as they were to the dark, tragic, antiwar piece that Liz chose from my catalog. Her Access to Music project is introducing countless new listeners to the power of new music played skillfully.”

— Chris Malloy