



Bass

ISB Convention 1999: The Heart of the Bass

by Nancy Bjork

Almost 500 bassists from around the world gathered in Iowa City May 31-June 5 to celebrate the bass. The event was the 1999 Convention of the ISB (International Society of Bassists), a stunning international gathering of more than 70 presenters, 38 exhibitors, and 500 attendees from 18 different countries. The event included a "Young Bassists Program" where students up to age 18 followed their own schedule of lessons, master classes, workshops and recreation, culminating in a concert at the end of the week which featured the world premier performance by the "Young Bassists Orchestra" of a new suite written for the occasion and conducted by renowned bassist /composer Bert Turetzky.

The week began with preliminaries and finals of the biennial ISB competition, divided into solo, orchestral, jazz and young bassists divisions. Our own Peter Lloyd (principal bass of the Minnesota Orchestra) chaired the orchestral division of the competition. (Equal weight is given in the ISB to both jazz and orchestral styles.)

The concert series began with recitals performed by the 1997 competition winners, and continued throughout the week with solo recitals, bass quartet performances, performances of all six Bach suites, and jazz performances. Two particularly arresting concerts culminated the week: Rufus Reid and Michael Moore in a duo jazz recital ("Double Bass Delights II") and the gala grand finale, John Patitucci with Bill Mays, an eagerly anticipated performance by one of this country's busiest young "stars."

Master classes with some of the world's finest teachers, forums, lectures, special presentations (such as SPCO's Chris Brown in a drama/recital called *The*

Lives in Our Days as Bass Players), and pedagogy sessions rounded out the program, while 38 exhibitors (including St. Paul luthier J. Michael Smith) displaying instruments, equipment, music and CDs tempted attendees between sessions.

I had been invited to present a session, and was thrilled that 11 of my private students could go with me to present a session on *Creative Recital Programming*. Local Twin Cities bassists had responded generously to a March solicitation for funds to help these students attend; all 11 of them came away bursting with the thrill of a fine performance, stimulation, stories, and new music and CDs. Our audience was large and responsive beyond my wildest dreams, and included master teachers such as Paul Ellison as well as star performers Rufus Reid and John Patitucci. The students played wonderfully as soloists as well as in duo, trio and bass choir combinations, including a narrated story. A once-in-a-lifetime experience!

ISB conventions take place every other year; the next will be at Butler University in Indianapolis with master teacher and performer David Murray overseeing the event. With the glow still fresh from this year's event, I look forward to the next with eagerness. See you there?

Nancy Bjork maintains a private studio of over 20 bass students, elementary age through high school, whose study culminates each year in a spectacular recital featuring solos, ensembles, guest bassists, and 20-member bass choirs. During the past 25 years, she has organized more than a dozen workshops with master bassists and has dedicated countless hours to mentoring public school string educators. An active free-lancer, she performs as principal bass with both the Plymouth Music Series of Minnesota and the Minneapolis Parks Pops Orchestra. †



Nancy Bjork's bass students perform at the ISB Convention