

Austin American-Statesman

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By Randy Harriman
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So you're watching a rehearsal of McCallum High School's Fine Arts Academy orchestra. Things seem to be going swimmingly, but suddenly a middle-aged violinist sitting next to the ensemble's principal violinist, Phillip Finkle, stands up, waves his bow and cries out in Italian, "Mai! Mai!"

The conductor, who is not Ricky Pringle, the school's director of orchestras (Pringle's temporarily playing last-chair violin in the ensemble) translates, in an engaging Italian accent: "Never! Never! Never play that note that loud!"

He restarts the piece, and this time the note is played correctly.

What's going on here?

What's going on is the preparation of a program of 18th-century Neapolitan classical music, part of a weeklong master class leading up to a concert by the orchestra in the Long Center's Dell Hall tonight. The violinist/coach is Alberto Vitolo, assistant artistic director of the Neapolitan Music Society; the conductor is Gioacchino Longobardi, president and artistic director of the organization, and they are in town to lead the proceedings.

Mention Neapolitan music to most folks and, if they make any connection at all, they might cite "O Sole Mio" and maybe "Funiculí, Funiculá" as two major examples of the genre. And they'd be right - if the genre were just 19th-century popular Italian music.

But ask maestro Longobardi or maestro Vitolo about music from "bella Napoli" and they'll start dropping 17th- and 18th-century composer names such as Scarlatti, Jommelli, de Majo, Durante and Fiorenza - and they probably could drop a couple of hundred more, if they chose.

So could Peter Ravella, the board chairman and one of the founders of the Neapolitan Music Society, an organization that is headquartered in Austin. "I've known Gioacchino for years as a conductor," he says, "but I think it was in March of



David Stence NEAPOLITAN CLASS
Neapolitan Music Society Assistant Artistic Director Alberto Vitolo plays the violin while society director Gioacchino Longobardi works with the McCallum Fine Arts Chamber Orchestra.



Longobardi works with high school students for a special concert of Neapolitan classical music.

last year that he started telling me stories about a Neapolitan classical music trove. Over the summer of 2007 we discussed the issues involved and decided to form a nonprofit society focused on that music, and that was finally done in October 2007.

"We formed it because there is a treasure, primarily in Naples, but in other places in Italy and the rest of Europe as well, of the works of 17th- and 18th-century Neapolitan masters. This treasure is not in the standard repertoire, so there's a very limited window into the archive. The work of the society is to try to bring this music back to life through preservation, performance and education."

Longobardi and Vitolo were

classmates at the San Pietro a Majella music conservatory in Naples. One of the principal repositories of the music of the Neapolitan masters, the conservatory's library contains about 700,000 manuscripts, which are largely uncataloged, unlike the music of, say, J.S. Bach or Mozart.

It was the pair's access to this vast collection, as well as the instruction they received in the compositional techniques employed in writing such music, that triggered their interest in the subject; and it is they who dug into the library, dusted off some manuscripts and reconstructed and transcribed the works of six composers for performance by modern ensembles like the McCallum orchestra.

The route from the San Pietro

McCallum Fine Arts Academy Orchestra: A Neapolitan Revival

When: 6 p.m. today
Where: Dell Hall at the Long Center for the Performing Arts, 701 W. Riverside Drive
Cost: \$15 - \$36
Contact: 474-LONG
www.thelongcenter.org

conservatory to McCallum's orchestra hall was remarkably direct: Ravella, who has a son attending the school, is a friend of Michael Coughlan, whose daughter is likewise a student there; in fact, Coughlan is an "orchestra parent."

"Peter told me about the project," Coughlan says, "and I was fascinated by it. Ricky Pringle was excited by the idea of McCallum being a part of it, the orchestra board was very supportive and that's how the orchestra became involved."

Tonight's concert will be preceded by a lecture on the Neapolitan masters and their works by Robert Gjerdingen, chair of the music history department of Chicago-area's Northwestern University. Proceeds from the event will help support the programs of the Neapolitan Music Society and provide funding for the McCallum chamber orchestra's appearance at Carnegie Hall in June 2009.