

Divided We Fall

by James Kjelland



Greetings and welcome to the first edition of "The String Corner". As contributing editor, I thought I'd kick things off with a short editorial about the need for string teachers and players at all levels to work more closely together. I recently heard a TV political ad titled "Divided We Fall". I think it's as true in the string world as it is in politics. From my vantage point – the academic-conservatory world but also working with school and private string teachers -- I see too many disconnects which work against our common purpose, that is, the promotion and growth of quality string teaching and playing at all levels of our society. This is essentially the mission of ASTA. When we look at the larger picture it can appear quite daunting as support for serious music dwindles, as symphony orchestras fold or are forced to cut back on concerts, musicians' pay, benefits, etc.; as school programs are cut for lack of numbers and or qualified teachers, as youth orchestras and public school programs feud

with each other due to a lack of understanding of their respective missions. I could go on and on, just as you could I'm sure. Indeed it would appear to be a time to "circle the wagons" especially with the even darker economic days ahead.

But rather than prepare for battle, it is imperative that we re- envision ourselves as a new organism, if you will, in which each component is regarded as essential to the others' survival and well-being -- which in fact it is. My intention in this column is to bring both private and public perspectives together to examine and share ideas on how better to serve the needs of all students as well as our diverse musical culture. I wrote an editorial for the *American String Teacher* a few years ago talking about how priorities at the college level have evolved in recent decades resulting in less awareness of and support for the public schools which should be regarded as an essential constituency. At Northwestern the predominant major in the undergraduate program 40 years ago was music education, last year, enrollment was over 95% performance. Although perhaps not as extreme, this pattern is repeated across the country even among traditionally strong music education-oriented colleges and universities. This in turn translates into fewer qualified string teachers graduating as well as a lack of curricular content for those who, for various reasons, will be teaching for their livelihood. Such preoccupation with the fruit of the tree is killing the root system. We certainly could use

more: a) colleges/universities recognizing the importance of good teachers and good teaching, b) school string teachers at least as concerned about quality as quantity, continuing their own education, and encouraging their best and brightest students toward a career in teaching, c) private teachers and youth orchestras strongly encouraging students to participate in school programs, and vice versa. Let's celebrate and support the unique contributions that each arena can make to the whole.

So I invite your input and participation in this column because it is after all your column too. It doesn't have to be a full article, just a paragraph or two can go a long way. I'd like to hear from private teachers who have made meaningful connections with local school programs, from school teachers working closely with private teachers, from college teachers doing outreach work in the schools, from those wanting to share successful teaching/playing tips, or from school and youth orchestra personnel cultivating positive working relationships. "Divided we fall" need not be our legacy.

If you would like to contribute to the ongoing dialogue of string pedagogy and performance either as a teacher or performer, please contact James Kjelland Associate Professor of Music Education, Northwestern University, School of Music at kjelland@northwestern.edu and/or voice: 847.491.4769, fax: 847.467.2363.