



The next sound

A new initiative at the MU School of Music provides scholarships and other community support to aspiring composers. Story by Dale Smith. Photo by Rob Hill.

Although Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) is now widely considered a musical genius whose work still sets a high standard for composition, in his time his sounds sometimes rankled Europe's old guard. Now, musical times are changing, right here in Missouri. In November 2009, Jeanne and Rex Sinquefield donated money to MU that will help create the Mizzou New Music Initiative, a program to educate the next generation of composers. Who knows, maybe the next Bach or Mozart or Beethoven will pass through MU on the way to musical immortality.

The Sinquefield's gift of \$250,000 annually for four years will make the New Music Initiative one of the best-funded programs of its kind in the nation. The money will pay for scholarships to attract top students, as well as prize money for composition competitions. With this new level of support, students and faculty members have the backing to build a composition program and new-music community that is the envy of the nation, says Stefan Freund, associate professor of music. But the benefit goes far beyond young composers in the program.

It's critical that universities foster an appreciation of the arts in all students, says Bill Bondeson, arts advocate and

Stefan Freund, a composer and performer of new music, teaches next-generation composers in the Mizzou New Music Initiative.

professor of philosophy. "Human beings have a fundamental urge and need to express themselves, and the arts are how we do that," he says. "Mizzou's students arrive knowing about the arts they grew up with, but they need their horizons expanded, and the New Music Initiative is the sort of program that gives them a solid arts experience. We're here to show people who've listened to rap all their life that there's also opera. We can show people who know rock bands that there's also great dance. We're also here to educate the composers, performers and teachers of the future. Without universities, the arts would be a lot poorer. This is an essential role we play in society."

Building a great program requires enticing talented students to enroll, and scholarships are key. The New Music Initiative will phase in eight full-ride undergraduate scholarships a year, beginning with the first two in fall 2010. There also will be six graduate assistantships going to composer-performers who play student compositions as part of the New Music Ensemble (flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano, percussion). "Music is all about performance," Freund says. Young composers need to hear their work and see how audiences react to it. "They also need to work with performers and learn to express their artistic vision through them."

The New Music Initiative has a statewide reach through competitions and outreach

programs that develop K–12 musical talent. Beyond that, an annual summer program to begin July 2010 will bring eight composers from all over the world to campus. They will compose new pieces that will be premiered by Alarm Will Sound, a 20-piece ensemble *The New York Times* calls "the future of classical music" and "the very model of a modern music chamber band."

The landscape of careers in new music has changed during the past 50 years, Freund says. "Between the 1950s and 1990s, most composers taught at universities and had college ensembles play their music. But now there are lots of streams of music. If I want to be a symphonic composer, that's different from what a film composer does or writing music for ESPN."

Freund says interest in new music is rising, in part because of new technology. "It's now easy to generate and share new music. Performances can be recorded with a \$200 device that does a great job. And many composers have their own websites, which makes it easy to disseminate their music." Those working outside the commercial realm build virtual communities this way, in addition to working with local performers to mount their work. Prospects for composers are as good as they've ever been, Freund says. ■

