

LETTER FROM NEW YORK

By JULIA CROWE

FLAUTIST HEATHER Holden and guitarist Bradley Colten, who form the Arc Duo, recently performed at the Diller-Quaile School of Music, where they both serve on faculty. Their programme featured contemporary music consisting of: Robert Beaser's *Mountain Songs*, Judah Adashi's *Songs of Kabir*, Roberto Sierra's *El Tercero Cronica del Descubrimiento* and Piazzolla's *History of the Tango*. Their rendition of the Piazzolla conveyed a particularly languid heat swept up in a spirited flair of guitar with the flute offering unexpected percussive texture that delighted the audience. The duo also dedicated their performance of the Sierra piece to audience member Larry Rawdon of Rawdon Hall Guitars in New York, who recently underwent a successful lung transplant. (Mr.



The Arc Duo: 'We're especially excited about commissioning new works.'

Rawdon credits a pulmonary specialist who happened to be attending last year's Stetson University International Guitar Festival for diagnosing him, quick to point out how his love for the guitar unequivocally saved his life.)

The Arc Duo, which recently received a Residency Partnership Grant from Chamber Music America, is looking forward to performing the premiere of the first-ever flute-guitar work commissioned from Roland Dyens at this year's GFA International Convention, October 10-15 in Columbus, Georgia. They also expect to release a CD this year featuring their recordings of Robert Beaser's *Mountain Songs*, Ned Rorem's *Romeo and Juliet*, Joan Tower's *Snow Dreams* and Astor Piazzolla's *History of the Tango*. The Dyens piece, commissioned by the Diller-Quaile School of Music, is dedicated to the duo.

Holden and Colten first met as students at the Manhattan School of Music while standing in line to register for their graduate programme classes with no idea they would wind up performing together.

'Initially, we played for each other, trying out new solo pieces we were working on. Then a year later, to fulfill our chamber music requirement, we began playing together as the Windstrum Duo, focusing on all sorts of flute-guitar repertoire from Bach and Sor arrangements to Piazzolla and Beaser,' Colten says. 'Then Heather moved to Italy with her husband, a trombonist, who was invited to play in the

Maggio Musicale Fiorentino in Florence for three years.'

When Holden returned to the States, the duo resumed performing together and took on a new name. 'After brainstorming with each other and our friends for what seemed like forever, the name Arc Duo popped into my head,' Colten says. 'We like the way it sounds and feels but we were also inspired by the idea that an arc is a connection between two points, as a duo. It has a strong architectural structure to it that seems to work for us.'

The duo also decided to focus exclusively on new and contemporary repertoire. 'It would be remarkable to find a piece in our programme that is older than thirty or forty years old,' Colten says. 'Great composers are becoming increasingly interested in writing for the combination and honestly we find the process of working with composers to be exhilarating. In particular, we look for pieces with well-balanced interplay between the two instruments and we're proud to help create new music for this ensemble type.'

'We also found that we play this type of repertoire well and this allows us to show many audiences that modern music can be fabulous. We're especially excited about commissioning new works and both feel that working directly with composers is one of the most rewarding aspects of music making.'

Their efforts have garnered particular praise from composers Ned Rorem, Joan Tower and David Leisner.

'Working with Ned Rorem, we learned that he wants a simple interpretation, exactly what's in the score. After playing his *Romeo and Juliet* for him, he exclaimed, "Good!" Then he insisted we stay and eat blueberry cobbler with him. Joan Tower was interested in our impressions about phrases and sections throughout her work *Snow Dreams*. At one point she directed us to a passionate section and said that she wrote it while thinking about bowling! That's an insight you cannot get anywhere but from the composer. She was a stickler for rhythmic precision and appreciated our rhythmic integrity. These examples deal with a work that is already composed, published and recorded,' Colten says.

'Working with a composer in the commissioning process can vary in experience, as some commissioning projects are very hands-on with the composer, in which we discuss and evaluate parts, chords or entire sections of the score - and with other composers we receive a completed clean score to work with, and simply interact with the composer on details. No matter what the scenario, when we work directly with a composer it feels as if he or she becomes part of the ensemble, even just for a period of time.'

For further information on the Arc Duo, their website is:

www.arcduo.com and www.diller-quaile.org

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