



## Working with Living Composers

Classical music, in the broadest sense, usually calls to mind venerable composers such as Mozart or Beethoven, names recognized for some of the most beloved and well-known works in the classical genre. More often than not, classical composers are no longer living, some of which not living within recent memory. Seeking indications as to how a composer might have wanted a work performed, one uses guides such as recordings, historical writings (some in the composer's own hand; others by colleagues, historians and editors) and documented performance practices contemporary to the composer.

In contrast, collaborating with living composers presents an exciting opportunity and unique challenge. These composers often do not have recordings. Typically there are fewer biographies from which to draw. Performance practice is as it is in the present; there is little or no retrospective to study. However, what one does have is the ability to ask a composer first-hand what he or she wants.

Two works presented by the Chamber Music Society of Southwest Florida this season provide excellent examples. Yale-graduate and composer Lori Laitman, whose CD "Becoming a Redwood" was recently nominated for a Grammy, proves to be a wonderful resource for her music. Choosing powerful poems by which to anchor her compositions, Ms. Laitman makes herself fully available to those that perform her music. In fact, in the January 2008 presentation of her work "The Seed of Dreams," Ms. Laitman co-wrote a grant, was in frequent contact with the performers and provided PR contacts, draft recordings and modified-part writing.

Venezuelan composer and wunderkind Reinaldo Moya, whose String Quartet No. 1 is to be presented on March 31<sup>st</sup>, will be present at its regional premiere. Moya journeyed from South America to study composition at Juilliard. He wrote with a specific quartet in mind and had the benefit of being in school with them, knowing the premiering musicians first-hand and also making himself accessible for when parts needed to be polished.

Even Mozart and Beethoven were considered to be new composers in their day and they, when premiering their music, worked first-hand with the artists that they had in mind. Perhaps our modern-era tools in communication and transcription are different, but a very valuable experience has remained the same: when working with a living composer, a performer becomes an active and creative partner with the composer in real time, as opposed to just an interpreter of history.

*Mezzo-soprano Janelle McCoy is the Artistic Director for the Chamber Music Society of Southwest Florida, [www.chambersociety.org](http://www.chambersociety.org).*