A Blueprint for Success

by Sue Wurster

Frank Lloyd Wright saw architecture as the “mother” of all art and said that “without an American architecture of our own, our civilization has no soul.” In their course, Architecture: Learning to Look, SGLs Caroline and Larry Schirian take participants on a journey through 150 years of architectural history in a search, perhaps, for the very essence of our civilization. No small task, but one, like so many others, that the Schirians have taken on with commitment and pleasure.

Oddly, neither member of this partnership actually started out with the intention of becoming an architect. Caroline says she has always drawn and liked math and science in school. At Case Western Reserve, she first thought about landscape or interior design. It was a female dean who suggested she try architecture, still a field heavily dominated by males. She joined CWR’s program as one of only two female students and found her niche.

Larry’s first plan was to become an engineer, but after two years, he knew that was not to be his path, but he hadn’t decided what to pursue. At about that time, he drove his mother’s cousin (who had also been his third grader teacher) and her elderly father from Pittsburgh to California. Early on the fifth day, as they left the mountains behind and entered the Arizona desert, Larry spotted a lone, contemporary house. “It seemed to have grown right out of the desert floor,” he says. “That’s when I knew I wanted to be an architect.”

At CWR, the two quickly became friends. “It was a five-year program,” Larry says, “and we had only maybe six electives in all, so we were with the same 26 people all day long--in classes and then in the studios.” Their friendship blossomed, and, during their senior year, they began dating. A year after graduation, they were married, and not long after that, they arrived in Boston to begin their very successful careers.

Both became project architect/managers, the ones who take rough sketches and turn them into buildings. Caroline did a lot of hospitals, labs, and classroom buildings while Larry did mostly college and university structures as well as an office tower, a jail, and various sports complexes. They both point to Louis Kahn as an architect they admire. Larry refers to him as “a deep thinker and perfectionist who always tried to define the problem before putting pen to paper.” Caroline comments that “while he is often thought of as Brutalist, Kahn really had his own style.” Larry also mentions (Continued on page 2)

Caroline and Larry Schirian relax in their colorful dining room. (Photo by Wurster)
A Blueprint for Success (continued from page 1)

Cambridge’s Ben Thompson, the architect known for the Design Research building on Brattle Street. “It’s basically a metaphor for a display case. It’s the contents of the building rather than the building itself that create the aesthetic,” he says. “Unfortunately, the current retailer doesn’t have the kind of merchandise to make the building sing.”

Perhaps the project they have both enjoyed most has been their historic home in Auburndale. “It’s been a labor of love for 42 years,” Caroline says, “but it’s also been a challenge. We didn’t have flooring in the dining room for ten years because we couldn’t agree on what we wanted!” Part of the house dates from 1810 when it was the gatehouse for a long-gone estate, but the rest was designed and completed by architect Charles Edward Parker in 1849. His son, composer Horatio Parker who was later to become Dean of the School of Music at Yale, was born in the house in 1863. Caroline has a particular interest in architectural preservation. The couple was instrumental in Auburndale’s Local Historic District being established in 2005.

After retiring from their large firms, the two set up their own architectural consulting business and joined BOLLI, where the idea for their partnership as SGLs in Learning to Look took root. Clearly, there is plenty of architectural blue ink running through the veins of the Schwirians.

Welcome, New Members!

We are pleased to welcome 53 new members from 19 cities and towns to our BOLLI community. This term, we have 410 total BOLLI members.

Boston: Esther Messing
Brookline: Lisa Liss, Stanley Quint
Cambridge: Alice Daniels, Arlene Kulin, Charles Lobron, Dianne Perlmutter, Julie Silberman
Canton: Max Bermann
Chestnut Hill: Peter Gordon, Cecile Mendelsohn, Peter Olsberg
Leominster: Robert Bizzotto
Lexington: Monika Berg
Methuen: Jo Klein, Elaine Pitocchelli
Natick: Sheila Checkoway, David Gottlieb, Jonathan Jaffe
Needham: Lynn Pieri
Newburyport: Patti Miliotis

Norwood: Peter Bradley
Reading: Grace Lerman, Cynthia Turover
San Juan: Susan Langus
Sudbury: Jay Atlas, Chris Hagger, Harvey Taylor
Waltham: Marie Daly, Donna Johns, Connie Koutoujian, Walter Leutz, Jerry Slavet
Watertown: Gloria Bernstein, Jean Carr
Wayland: Carol Shirey, Terry Shirey
Wellesley: Sheila Brachfeld, Susan Rosefsky

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The Director’s Corner

By Avi Bernstein

When I talk about BOLLI these days, my first words are often “BOLLI is a small liberal arts college for older adults.” True, as our watchwords proclaim, we are a place “where learning and friendship thrive.” But I’m beginning to think that we need to supplement this aptly chosen phrase in order to capture more precisely what’s special about our institute. We are not only a place of learning and friendship -- like so many institutions of learning from K through 12, from Continuing Ed to Church and Synagogue. We are also a place where knowledge circulates, curiosity becomes inquiry, and readers rejoice in textual dispute. As a lifelong learning institute located at an elite university, we are then also an academy, and one of a special variety: an academy informed by the life experience of older adults.

BOLLI leaders recently gathered for our semi-annual leaders retreat, and the agenda underscores my point. Dick and Isabel Hanelin, who are launching a new Special Interest Group (SIG) titled Adventures in Creative Senior Housing, shared their initial plans. They will convene a group to explore the landscape of senior housing options, including aging in place, continuing care communities, university-based communities, village-based communities, and senior co-housing communities. Additionally, Sue Adams, Diana Young, and Ann Ross explained their vision for another new SIG that would delve into the history, culture, and civic fabric of Waltham. This group will be known as BOLLI Waltham Matters. Both new SIGs are open to all BOLLI members. Consult the BOLLI website for details.

Another topic that animated the leaders retreat was diversity and inclusion in the BOLLI community, and this, too, links us to the liberal learning tradition. Cindy Wentz, BOLLI member and diversity and inclusion liaison, spoke eloquently about the challenges of navigating BOLLI as a new member who is blind. Many leaders around the table chimed in with words of affirmation for the notion that we have work yet to do to become a welcoming space for all prospective BOLLI members, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability. If you have experience or insight with this challenge, please reach out to Cindy or me to share your thoughts. The truth is not only that we support diversity as a community of well-intentioned people; as a community of higher learning, we sorely need it. Easy agreement, homogeneity of background and experience do not challenge or well inform us. Contention, differences in background, life experience, vantage point, and perspective: these are the strong elements that are likely to enrich our dialogue, deepen our knowledge and understanding, and educate our conscience.

Finally, I'd like you to be aware that your Director and volunteer leadership are taking a careful look at how we can harness the power of Brandeis technology to enhance your learning and inter-connectivity at BOLLI. We sometimes hear that members are frustrated by the absence of opportunities to share information or explore common interests with their fellow members. Lunch Together, a program that encourages study group members to dine with one another before or after class, was created to meet this frustration head-on. Does technology harbor yet another approach to voluntary, meaningful connection outside of the more structured activities of our community? A digital bulletin board, for example: could such a technology enhance the BOLLI experience, supporting interested members in exchanging information within the ambit of their mutual concern? A technology help desk and internet-based course management system are two additional innovations that we will be exploring for 60 Turner Street in the course of this year.

I believe that in the coming half decade BOLLI will only grow in its character (Continued on Page 7)
Winter Seminar - *Henry IV, Part 1 “Redeeming Time”*

by Marjorie Roemer

It was December 18th, and 28 of the faithful, among them many familiar faces, came to enjoy the brilliance of Brandeis Professor Billy Flesch expounding on Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part 1*. Five whirlwind days offered up references to Roy Moore, literary critic Harold Bloom, Queen Elizabeth, Troy, the Roman Empire, *Julius Caesar*, *The Tempest*, *King Lear*, *the Merchant of Venice*, and “very fine people on both sides” in just the first fifteen minutes.

The beloved Billy is the very definition of a polymath. Everything is topical for him. At a moment’s notice, he can recite relevant lines from *Richard II* or refer us to Kipling’s “Ballad of East and West,” or the story of Jacob and Esau, and then wind up talking about Donald Trump and his migration from Queens to the presidency. Everything connects, and everything is remembered.

One way to read *Henry IV, Part 1*, Billy contends, is to see it as a warm-up for *Hamlet*. In each play, we see a generational struggle from the point of view of a son; in each, it is the younger generation that exhibits idealism and the older generation that is the more Machiavellian.

As dazzling as these leaps and connections are, the deeper power of Flesch’s seminars lies in the depth of humanity and compassion that Billy promotes as we wend our way through the complex histories of Richard, Bolingbroke, Hal, and Hotspur. Often quoted was Hegel’s dictum that tragedy is not right against wrong, but right against right: there is virtue and reason on both sides of the battle. So, Hal and Hotspur are worthy adversaries.

We ponder the thought that these stories are about estrangement and characters who become less estranged. Here, Prince Hal will learn to become what he was pretending to be. And he will mediate between Falstaff’s unfettered celebration of life and Hotspur’s total commitment to honor.

In the end, we read these plays as deep psychological portraits. Billy points out that Shakespeare noticed things that other people hadn’t noticed, so that we are given deep truths about human behavior and an opportunity to identify with multiple perspectives.

While I marvel at the extent to which Billy has so many lines and references “by heart,” I was, this time, more impressed by how deeply he reads “by heart,” finding compassion and respect for the headstrong Hotspur no less than the excessively self-indulgent Falstaff.

The play is also about time. Richard II had said: “I wasted time, and now doth time waste me.” In the opening scene of *Henry IV, Part 1*, King Henry remarks on the lateness of his resolve to join the Crusades. Time is of the essence, and Hal memorably lets us know his future course when he vows he will be “redeeming time when men think least I will.” And so did we redeem time on those December days in delightful reanimation of this remarkable play, over 400 years old but timely now as ever.

Seminar Leaders: Flesch and Harel

Two of BOLLI’s most popular seminar leaders, Brandeis Professor of English Billy Flesch (left) and Gil Harel (below) of Naugatuck Valley Community College in Waterbury, CT. (Photos by Helen Abrams)
Ah, Bach! We have been inspired by his music all our lives. It is sublime, complex, often mystifying—among the greatest achievements of Western civilization. Yet we know little about the man who produced this monumental body of work. He left us no accounting of his life or his art—no explanations or intimate glimpses that could be interpreted in plays, films, or fictionalized narrative. In a week-long seminar series, *The World of Johann Sebastian Bach: Music and Purpose in the Baroque Period*, BOLLI favorite Gil Harel promised to enhance our appreciation of Bach’s music and help us understand the religious and historical influences on the composer.

Bach had a tragic early life. Born into a musical family, Johann Sebastian was orphaned at age 10 and lived with an older brother who saw to his early musical training until, at 15, the younger Bach traveled 200 miles to study choral music and advance his already impressive skills as an organist. Two years later, unable to afford the university, he ended his formal schooling and embarked on his career as an organist and church musician.

Music was therapeutic for Bach but hardly cheerful. Half of his music is written in a dark, minor key unlike, for example, Mozart’s catchy melodies, written mostly in major keys and intended to divert audiences, to make them happy. Bach did not write music to make his listeners happy. He believed the purpose of music was to honor God and to instruct his neighbor, reflecting a then-current movement within Lutheranism that emphasized individual piety. Much of his music is somber, meditative, and penitential, with dissonances that symbolize human frailty and the fall of man.

Stylistically, Bach absorbed and assimilated everything he heard and laid the foundation for everything that followed. His music is characteristic of the late Baroque period, by which time a single musical line (monophony) had given way to polyphony, which featured multiple independent musical lines. This was brilliantly illustrated by an animated graphical score that enabled us to visually follow the four voices of a fugue, each playing the same thing but not at the same time.

Our journey through Bach’s oeuvre included stops to listen to and discuss his organ music, solo and orchestral suites, cantatas, the *St. John* and *St. Matthew Passions*, the *Goldberg Variations*, the *Brandenburg Concertos*, the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, *The Art of the Fugue*, and the *Mass in B Minor*. We learned that, unlike many composers, Bach did not improve with age. He set his terms at the beginning and stuck to them. He was a traditionalist, stubborn and resistant to change, often at odds with his employers, and he never took shortcuts or sold out. His music challenged the performer and the listener. But oh, the rewards!
In January and February, a large group of BOLLI members attended a series of complimentary lectures on aspects of the Harlem Renaissance, that period in American History from roughly the early Twenties to the late Thirties or the end of World War II (depending on one's point of view) that saw an explosion of creativity in the arts in Harlem's African American community. The lectures were supported by Road Scholar, the not-for-profit organization that offers programs aimed at seniors who seek to combine worldwide travel adventures with lifelong learning experiences.

The first lecture--on literary aspects of the Harlem Renaissance--was given by popular SGL Ben Railton, Professor of English Studies and Coordinator of American Studies at Fitchburg State University. His lecture focused on the works of three icons of the Harlem Renaissance: W.E.B. DuBois, Nella Larsen, and Langston Hughes.

DuBois was an influential figure, prolific writer, and founder of the NAACP whose book The Soul of Black Folk dealt nominally with black history but with broader implications for American history and influenced the onset of the Harlem Renaissance.

Nella Larsen wrote three widely read novels in the 1920s--Quicksand, Passing, and Sanctuary--that explored issues of race, sex, and relationships from women's perspective. Passing, in particular, pursues the very different marital relationships of three mixed-race women whose skin color is light enough to enable them to “pass” as white.

The best known of the three writers was poet Langston Hughes, whose lengthy poem I, Too addresses the role of the Negro in America.

The remaining lectures in the five-session series were delivered by Eric Elder, a Ph.D. candidate in Musicology at Brandeis. His presentations, which were enhanced by photographs, movie clips, and vintage recordings, afforded attendees a wide-ranging sample of the people and diverse music of the Harlem Renaissance and their precursors.

Harlem became a gathering place not only for southern blacks who traveled north during the Great Migration but also for Caribbeans, whose indigenous music was an essential component in the development of the African American repertoire. Seminal figures of the time included Scott Joplin, Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, Ethel Waters, Louis Armstrong, and the lesser known James Reese Europe, whose 1912 Concert of Negro Music was the first Carnegie Hall concert performed by African Americans.

Minstrel shows, jug bands, cabaret, ragtime, spirituals and blues were all part of the Harlem scene. Military bands organized in towns throughout the country became an unlikely influence, as participants were often provided with free musical training. One beneficiary was the young Armstrong, a member of the New Orleans “Colored Waif’s Home Band.”

Racism, both subtle and overt was, of course, in evidence. Sheet music, which at the time was widely distributed and highly profitable, frequently depicted African Americans in vulgar and objectionable ways.
Music of the Harlem Renaissance (continued)

Songs of the era were often shaped to appeal to a white audience. As one example, Elder cited Hoagy Carmichael's *Old Man Harlem*, which, when performed by Carmichael, portrays Harlem as a den of iniquity, while later performances by Eddie South and Ethel Waters paint a quite different picture.

Elder made frequent reference to the writings of African American educator and philosopher Alain Locke and his pursuit of “an ideal Harlem Renaissance aesthetic.” Deemed by Elder “a cultural constructionist,” Locke felt that the music of the Harlem Renaissance should aspire to an “evolutionary goal” and saw it as caught between the “folk form” and the training and tradition of a “higher European art form.” As for the audience, it’s safe to say that most came away from the lectures pleased that, while Locke pursued his philosophical musings, the gifted musicians of the Harlem Renaissance played on.

The Director’s Corner (continued from page 3)

as a small liberal arts college for older adults. As an affiliate of Brandeis we will be buoyed by the quality of its faculty and students and benefit from its growing technological infrastructure. We will also continue to add “extracurricular” activities--the Adventures in Creative Housing SIG and the BOLLI Waltham Matters SIG being only the latest--and, in this fashion, build a community of inquiry beyond the confines of the lifelong learning classroom. As a community we will also continue to become more diverse and inclusive, a trend in much of American liberal education during the past 50 years. Have an incisive thought to share or a question to add to the dialogue? In our very special and rapidly evolving academy, you have a place at the table.
Upcoming Campus Events
Compiled by Ellen Moskowitz

SLOSBERG MUSIC CENTER

Joshua Gordon, Cello, and Randall Hodgkinson, Piano. Saturday, March 10, 8:00-9:30 p.m. Hodgkinson and Lydian String Quartet member Gordon will perform a variety of pieces from their repertoire. Tickets $20; $15 for Brandeis community and seniors (55+). Purchase online, by phone at 781-736-3400 or in person at Brandeis Tickets, located in the Shapiro Campus Center atrium.

A Tribute to Irving Fine. Sunday, March 11, 3:00 p.m. This year’s tribute to composer, educator, and founder of the School of Creative Arts features Philadelphia’s Dolce Suono Ensemble (pictured left). Free and open to the public.

A Night in Indonesia: Javanese Gamelan. Saturday, March 24, 8:00 p.m. (with preconcert talk at 7:00 p.m.) Preview, Wednesday, March 21 at noon in Mandel Center Atrium. Music Unites US presents a transfixing concert experience by master musicians of the ancient Java gong orchestras. Tickets $20; $15 for Brandeis community and seniors (55+). Preview at Mandel Center is free and open to the public.

GOLDFARB LIBRARY: RAPAPORTE TREASURE HALL

Richman Fellow Award Presentation and Lecture by Vanita Gupta. Tuesday, March 6, 4:00-6:00 p.m. Vanita Gupta, former top civil rights prosecutor in the U.S. and the current president of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. She is the first woman and first child of immigrants to run the nation’s largest civil and human rights coalition. The Richman Fellowship recognizes individuals active in public life who have made significant contributions to improve American society, strengthen democratic institutions, advance social justice, or increase opportunities for all citizens.

Close Looking Series: Charles Darwin’s Origin of Species. Tuesday, March 13, 3:30-5:00 p.m. Presented by the Mandel Center for the Humanities, the Rose Art Museum, and the Farber University Archives & Special Collections, this interdisciplinary series features viewing of original art and manuscripts housed at Brandeis with discussions led by faculty members James Morris (Biology) and John Plotz (English). Free and open to the public. Tea and cakes will be served.

SPINGOLD THEATER

Into the Woods. Thursday, March 15 through Saturday, March 17 at 8:00 p.m. with matinees on Saturday, March 17 and Sunday, March 18 at 2:00 p.m. The acclaimed musical with book by James Lapine and music/lyrics by Stephen Sondheim is presented by the Brandeis Theater Arts program. Tickets $20; $15 for Brandeis community and seniors (55+).