

Interplay for Three Violins and Orchestra
By Christopher Brubeck

A few months ago, Keith Lockhart and the Boston Pops approached me with the very intriguing notion of writing a piece for a trio of very distinguished violinists from three very different musical worlds. I had seen Eileen Ivers electrify the audience in England several years ago as the featured musical soloist in a then little known show, *Riverdance*. Her abundant natural talent made a huge impression on my wife and me, and the chance to work with her was totally enticing. Regina Carter is one of the biggest young jazz stars today, and I had heard her recordings, plus caught the powerful buzz about her remarkable abilities from other jazz musicians I work with. Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg has a reputation for incredible music-making with her amazing intensity and technique. She also has been doing some extremely interesting projects with musicians outside of the classical mainstream. These are the kind of eclectic and talented musicians I like to collaborate with!

If you are wondering how one goes about putting something like this together, the process went something like this. First, we had a big meeting in New York City with the artists, their managers, Boston Pops management, and WGBH television. Comparing schedules was the first order of business. I'm on tour all the time, and so are all three of the violinists, so the first sobering discovery was that there were only 2 days in common when we could all meet in New York again for rehearsals before the premiere. Another huge factor was for me to get a sense of the personalities of the musicians. There was a great deal of instant camaraderie and respect for each other's talents. All the violinists also displayed an infectious sense of humor to go with their abilities. We talked in very general terms about what we hoped to achieve with the new work, and how I wanted to feature them all in their home field of natural strength, but also challenge them to step into the others' musical territory. I knew that this project was going to work out just fine when they all seemed eager to venture into slightly unfamiliar surroundings. The dominant impression made at this meeting was that these artists interacted in an extremely playful fashion. Now I had my "hook." I decided on an opening theme that was indeed a bit quirky, humorous, high energy, and loaded with musical phrases being tossed around like an exhilarating game of catch. A few weeks later, I presented a piano-and-three-violin sketch to Keith Lockhart in Boston. His enthusiastic thumbs-up meant I could deliver the composition to Nadja, Regina and Eileen.

In *Interplay*, I wanted to incorporate a bit of the violin styles one hears in various cultures. Exploring the inter-relationship between folk music and how it might relate to classical traditions intrigued me. As a composer I just start writing and experimenting --sometimes the results are richer than what I imagined. In my sketches, it soon became clear to me that some of the traditional folk music melodies I was incorporating thematically were easily integrating with classical harmonic progressions. These Bach-like chord progressions totally tied into the chord changes of jazz standards. Jazz musicians still cut their teeth on improvising over the same kinds of changes that Bach and his fellow organists created and improvised over centuries ago. It was fitting that Regina be given space to improvise, and coming from a more folksy tradition, Eileen was given some space to stretch out and deliver the heart of her musical roots. Nadja was given a couple of cadenzas in the classical vein, the first of which I wrote with a tongue-in-cheek attitude. She also relished the chance to play in the jazzy sections. After listening to their most recent CDs I discovered that all three delved into a gypsy/flamenco realm as well. This provided the perfect common ground for exciting musical trading, improvising, displays of technical prowess, and playful interaction among the three violinists, before restating the opening theme. I hope you have as much fun listening to this piece as I did writing it and discovering the many dimensions of these three fantastic artists.