

## Plaine & Easie Wins EMA's Medieval/Renaissance Competition

The Seattle-based quartet **Plaine & Easie** emerged victorious at the third EMA Medieval/Renaissance Competition Finals concert, held on October 7 at Corpus Christi Church in New York. The ensemble (Linda Tsatsanis, soprano, Shulamit Kleinerman, violin, Nathan Whittaker, bass violin, and John Lenti, lute) offered a lively half hour of (mostly) English Renaissance music that explored the intersection of the violin family with the lute song and consort music. Centered on Dowland's "From silent night," Plaine & Easie's very polished and engaging program, which included pieces by Thomas Morley (author of *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke*, after which the group was named) and Thomas Campion, as well as an Italian madrigal, "Chi passa per 'sta strada," afforded all the members plenty of opportunity for virtuoso playing and singing in a variety of configurations.

Plaine & Easie received the Unicorn Prize, which consists of a cash award of \$2,000 and engagements in 2010-11 or 2011-12 in Seattle (Early Music Guild), Milwaukee (Early Music Now), and Pittsburgh (Renaissance & Baroque). The panel of judges included Mary Anne Ballard (Baltimore Consort), Johanne Goyette (ATMA Classique), Valerie Horst (Amherst Early Music), Drew Minter (Trefoil), and Frederick Renz (Early Music New York). Horst was impressed with the group's accomplished musicianship, presentation, and audience rapport. "Having the entire program memorized was a great plus," she said. "I actively enjoyed listening to them and was sorry when their performance came to an end." The 100-strong audience agreed and cast ballots to also give Plaine & Easie the Competition's first Audience Prize, a \$1,000 cash award.

Tsatsanis brought the ensemble together in the spring, enlisting Lenti, her regular duo partner, and Whittaker. The three have been regular collaborators since their student days at Indiana University and are active in the Seattle early music scene, particularly in Baroque music: Lenti serves as assistant director and continuo player for the Seattle Baroque Orchestra and Whittaker, a DMA candidate in historical cello at the University of Washington, is a member of the Seattle Baroque Orchestra and the Pacific Baroque Orchestra. They had also worked individually with Kleinerman, who specializes in Renaissance off-shoulder violin technique. She said, "The EMA competition gave us the occasion to do some in-depth work together on this earlier repertoire." The three Dowland lute songs that are the group's reason for being include an instrumental cantus and bassus, creating a consort of equal contributors.

The group is looking forward to delving deeper into the repertoire. "There's tons of stuff to do with this instrumental configuration," said Kleinerman. "It's fun exploring so many timbral combinations—everything from little two-part polyphonic gems to raucous country dances, and then the big rich Elizabethan songs." Plaine & Easie plans to keep its roots in the English music, but also explore the "continental connection," seeing the violin family as an "Italian import." In addition to the three engagements that go with



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*From left: Shulamit Kleinerman, John Lenti, Linda Tsatsanis, and Nathan Whittaker, members of Plaine & Easie, after winning the EMA Medieval/Renaissance Competition in New York City.*

the prize, other presenters who attended the concerts have expressed interest. "It's a good thing we like each other," Kleinerman said.

The two other finalist ensembles offered music of other countries and periods, making for a diverse evening. First up was the Montreal-based **Ensemble Alkemia** (Jean-Francois Daignault, Pierre-Alexandre Saint-Yves, Dorothea Ventura, and Dany Wiseman). Their program, "Amor y Guerra: Music from the Cancionero Musical de Palacio" featured buoyant performances of Spanish music from the early 16th century, with three of the performers alternating between voice and recorders and Wiseman switching between voice and spinet. The second ensemble, **Musica Fantasia** (Julie Rynning, soprano, Ji-Sun Kim, recorders, and Katelyn Clark, keyboards) is also Montreal-based, with all three members of the trio now pursuing advanced studies at McGill. Their program focused on Italian music of the 14th century, with a plaintive performance of Ciconia's "O rosa bella" as its centerpiece. All the finalist ensembles participated in a coaching session with Grant Herreid on the day before the concert.

The goal of EMA's Medieval/Renaissance Competition is to encourage the development of emerging artists in the performance of Medieval and Renaissance music. Ensembles (with two or more performers) may not have been performing together for more than five years; members must be residents of the U.S. or Canada, and age 39 or under. The duo Asteria won the 2004 competition; Ensemble La Rota took the prize in 2006. Both ensembles have produced recordings and booked numerous concerts and tours since winning the prize. Horst noted that Plaine & Easie can certainly do so as well. She says, "The group can be counted on to put on a pleasing show for the presenters and make EMA proud."

—Heidi Waleson