

# KEY CHANGE

Professor of Music Dan Graves says that if you graduated from Earlham 10 or more years ago, you'd hardly recognize the music department now.

All of the full-time music faculty members have arrived in that span. The curriculum has been revamped to provide a more international orientation. And new ensembles have been added — or expanded — to offer more students the opportunity to make music on campus.

According to a recent count, 33% of all on-campus students are involved in music department activities in a typical semester, an astonishing number for a program with only three full-time faculty mem-

bers and extremely limited space in which to work. The department now sponsors a dozen ensembles including a full orchestra, two jazz groups, four choirs, a Javanese gamelan ensemble, two percussion ensembles and a slew of instrument-specific ensembles.

“I think the changes that have happened in our department are an enthusiastic recognition of what Earlham is about,” says Graves, who now teaches half time in the department. He stepped down as director of the choral program last year after 24 years at the podium. “Our department is still strong in the study of the Western classical music



*Associate Professor of Music Forrest Tobey in rehearsal with the Earlham College Orchestra.*

WITH A THIRD OF THE STUDENT BODY PARTICIPATING IN ITS PROGRAMS AND DUAL FOCUS ON WESTERN AND NON-WESTERN MUSIC, EARLHAM'S MUSIC DEPARTMENT IS FULL OF PLEASANT SURPRISES.

BY JONATHAN GRAHAM

tradition, but what we have added really broadens what we do.”

Replacing Graves as choral director is Assistant Professor of Music Bill Culverhouse, a specialist in choral conducting and Western music history who earned his doctorate at the University of Maryland. At Earlham, he conducts the Concert Choir, Madrigal Singers and Women's Chorus.

“One of the great things about being here is that there are so many opportunities to try new things in the department,” says Culverhouse. “When I come in with an idea, my colleagues tend to say, ‘yeah, go for it.’”

#### NOT MUSIC, BUT MUSICS

Associate Professor of Music Marc Benamou has a challenge for you. Find another college or university in the country that has a music department as small as Earlham's, where one of the faculty members is an ethnomusicologist. You might find one, but you certainly won't find many.

“There are a number of large and well-respected departments — like Princeton or Stanford — where there are thirty, forty or even sixty faculty members, and not a single ethnomusicologist. But Earlham made a major decision to move outside the canon of Western music,” says Benamou.

PHOTOS BY TOM STRICKLAND





*Associate Professor of Music Marc Benamou*

Benamou, who has a book on the aesthetics of Javanese music due out soon from Oxford University Press, leads Earlham's Gamelan group. Earlham's gamelan group performs on an exquisite set of traditional Javanese instruments that are mostly made of bronze and were purchased in 2006. According to various guest artists, Earlham's set is one of the finest Javanese gamelans on a U.S. college campus.

The results of this broadening of perspective are evident from a perusal of Earlham's curriculum guide. There are now courses on the introductory and advanced levels in both Western and Non-Western music. Majors are required to sample from history and theory courses from both areas.

Graves notes that while the department continues to send some of its majors on to graduate work and careers that focus on Western classical music, the curriculum now has a much more international perspective than it did when he joined the faculty.

"Twenty-five years ago, this department essentially taught students about one music: Western music in the classical tradition. There was a course in the music of Japan, but the department simply did not have the multicultural perspective it has today," says Graves. "Now we talk about 'musics.' We didn't do that in 1984."

### **THE MORE THE MERRIER**

The most obvious evidence of growth and evolution in the music department is in the number, size and variety of student ensembles that perform each semester. Some, like Gospel Revelations — the 175-voice choir that routinely packs the house at Goddard Auditorium — to a hand drum ensemble with 30 or more members each semester, are open to novices. Others, like the Madrigal Singers and the orchestra,

are for more experienced musicians, and these groups are thriving, too.

The orchestra, which has grown in size in recent years and this year has played such challenging symphonic works as Modest Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exposition" and Beethoven's 1st Symphony, now fills every inch of the Goddard stage. The group has grown in size from a modestly sized chamber orchestra (known as the Chamber Musicians) to a full orchestra (averaging 50 players) and plays at a high level.

Conductor Forrest Tobey, an associate professor of music, attributes the quality of his ensemble to the dedication and talents of his students, noting that to some degree, the success of the orchestra simply mirrors the larger trends at the College.

"I have a theory that as Earlham has increased its number of applicants and become a little more selective, we've been attracting more excellent students. The best students are very often instrumentalists, too," says Tobey. "In a sense, I'm a beneficiary of Earlham's success."

Tobey points out that in this year's orchestra, three of the principals (concert mistress Charlotte-Anne Malischewski, first viola David Goldenberg and first cello Kevin Schmidt) are all first-year students.

"They all came in with very strong skills, and they are playing together as a string trio, too," Tobey says.

As a composer, Tobey collaborated with Culverhouse last fall on the premiere of new work for choir and orchestra. Tobey based the piece on the Pablo Neruda poem, "Keeping Still." Culverhouse notes that the performing of new compositions is an important part of the music education that the department offers.

"It is enriching for musicians to be a part of the process of premiering a new composition," says Culverhouse, who has also included one of his own compositions in the Concert Choir repertoire this year.

“Not only can the students see the back and forth between the composer and the conductor during rehearsal, but they also get to see how a composer goes back and makes adjustments over time. It’s not uncommon for pieces to continue to evolve after their premieres, but performers don’t always get to witness that process.”

### OPEN TO THE NEW

When Benamou first encountered gamelan music, he didn’t know what to make of it. But as he has studied and played the music over the course of many years, he has found richness in a form that sounds strange to Western ears.

“I couldn’t wrap my mind around what was happening in the music, and that was what I found so fascinating about it,” notes Benamou. “I also like that ethnomusicology puts not limits on the musics that can be studied academically, and hence there is less of a tendency to develop an ossified canon than there has been in Western musicology.”

It is that openness to new ideas and less well known forms of music that Benamou and his colleagues in the Earlham music department hope to instill in their students. Like any part of the liberal arts curriculum, music courses at Earlham encourage students to think critically about subject matter, striving to make connections between different forms of music and between music and the culture from which it comes. This is a natural fit for ethnomusicology courses. Benamou also notes that exploring how musics from different parts of the world relate to one another makes perfect sense on an increasingly international campus like Earlham’s.

“I am hyperaware of generalizations, and I have stopped using the words ‘we’ and ‘our’ and ‘their’ in class because there is very likely someone in the class who doesn’t belong to the ‘we’ that I do,” says Benamou.

In courses that focus on music theory and the history of Western music, too, the focus has broadened.

“For me, there are porous walls between different types of music,” notes Forrest Tobey, who teaches the composition and theory courses. “I have no problem playing a Chopin Prelude in class and following that with ‘Hey, Jude’ by The Beatles.”

Tobey says that since he performs both classical and jazz music as a pianist and since he has lived in India and studied that country’s musical traditions, it is relatively easy for him to avoid the tendency, still prevalent in some music departments, to view Western classical music as inherently superior to all other forms. To complement Benamou’s course in non-western music, Tobey is developing a course in the music of India while Culverhouse is conducting initial research on Middle Eastern vocal music, with hopes of incorporating some of what he learns into his teaching at Earlham.

Graves adds that Earlham is certainly not alone in its shift to a more multicultural approach to the study of music. Many other colleges and universities offer similar courses of study. But Graves counts his own expanded worldview as one of the great gifts of teaching at Earlham for a quarter century. During his tenure as director of the choral music program, his choirs sang in 20 different languages, and his history courses have continued to evolve in recent years, often exploring popular music alongside classical forms. The department also encourages students to think about connections between music and other aspects of their lives in such courses as Music and Morality, Music and Language and Music and Gender.



Earlham's Gamelan ensemble

### AWAKENING THE MUSICIAN WITHIN

“I can’t take someone who has never played an instrument before and stick them in the orchestra,” says Tobey. “So it is really wonderful that we have many different ensembles here.”

The full-time faculty take great pains to point out that the quality and diversity of the College’s music program would not be possible without the generosity and hard work of a large contingent of part-time instructors, many of whom travel some distance to teach private lessons at the College and, in some cases, lead ensembles as well. Particularly noteworthy is Keith Cozart, a percussionist who leads a large hand drum ensemble (which is open to beginners) and the Earlham Rhythm Project for more experienced players.

Another relatively recent addition to the department curriculum is a course entitled Music Technology, in which Tobey helps students build skills in composing, arranging and performing music using computer technology. He has created a small studio in Tyler Hall to create compositions based on the sounds of ordinary musical instruments, or create soundscapes from sounds that are not usually associated with music. The course is another opportunity for the department to engage students with varied interests.

“We have had solid participation in the music program as long as I’ve been here, but the numbers have grown steadily in recent years,” says Graves, who came to Earlham in 1984. “We haven’t abandoned what we had in the past. It’s just that now, we are able to do more than ever.”

## A ‘PICTURE’ OF COLLABORATION

Modest Mussorgsky’s “Pictures at an Exposition” is a short series of pieces written in response to paintings by the composer’s friend, Viktor Hartmann. As the orchestra was preparing to play the piece in concert last April, the Earlham fine arts division took the connection between music and the visual arts one step further.

Two dozen art students created paintings, photographs or works in metal that were inspired by listening to recordings of Mussorgsky’s music. Art faculty Walt Bistline, Nathan Jones and Mark Van Buskirk assisted with the project. The finished works were on display in the lobby and the back of the auditorium during the concert, which also featured Mussorgsky’s well-known piece, “A Night on Bald Mountain.”

A large and enthusiastic crowd gave the orchestra a standing ovation at the end of the concert and marveled at the creations by art students. After hearing that the paintings on display came from a beginning painting class, one professor from outside the fine arts remarked, “If these came from Painting I, I’m not qualified to take that class!”