



Sharing Music, Feeding Souls

Violinist Kelly Hall-Tompkins '93E organizes a long-running concert series for New York City's homeless.

By David McKay Wilson

AS HOMELESS MEN AND WOMEN SIT DOWN for lunch at Holy Apostle Church in Manhattan, violinist **Kelly Hall-Tompkins '93E** places her Stradivarius in the crook of her neck, nods to her fellow musicians, and then leads them in a Brahms string sextet.

The church sanctuary in Chelsea may lack the acoustical magnificence of Carnegie Hall, where Hall-Tompkins played a few months earlier. But that's not a concern in the Music Kitchen—Food for the Soul series that she has brought to New York shelters and soup kitchens since 2005. As the

▲ **MUSICAL MESSAGE:** “Music reaches the core of our being,” says Hall-Tompkins '93E, who organizes a concert series in New York City's shelters and soup kitchens.

performance of the *String Sextet No. 2 in G Major* brings the series' 45th concert to a conclusion, a group of men gather nearby, erupting in whoops and later posing for photographs with the smiling sextet.

“Music can help bring people out of themselves,” says Hall-Tompkins, who lives in Manhattan with her husband, **Joe Tompkins '92E**, a percussionist. “And you get a response here like you don't get in the concert hall.”

Hall-Tompkins has received many ovations, in concert halls and elsewhere, thanks to a music career that has taken her across the United States and around the world. A member of the New Jersey Symphony and the Florida-based Ritz Chamber Players, she's also the concertmaster for both the New York Pops Orchestra and the Chamber Orchestra of New York.

She developed the Music Kitchen concerts in 2004, when she was preparing for a series of solo concerts. In the aftermath of a friend's death, she hadn't arranged to play the repertoire for her colleagues, as she typically did before such performances.

Her husband, who was then volunteering at their congregation's homeless shelter, suggested she play for the men at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church. She played one night, and they asked her to return the following day. It was such a success that she put together chamber groups, building on the tradition in chamber circles of bringing together musicians at parties for spontaneous readings of their favorite works.

She found financial support from private donors and put together groups that have included renowned pianist Emmanuel Ax and cellist Jeffrey Zeigler '95E of the Kronos Quartet. This spring, she celebrated the fifth anniversary of the series with five concerts in five weeks.

Growing up in Greenville, S.C., Hall-

Tompkins had her heart set on performing violin after being introduced to the instrument in the fourth grade. By high school, she was studying with Lenny Schranze '81E at the Fine Arts Center in Greenville, where Schranze taught chamber music in the public-school magnet program. Over one school vacation, he took the class to New York to hear top performers. He encouraged Hall-Tompkins to apply to Eastman.

"She has always been a bright, sparkly player," says Schranze, an associate professor of music at the University of Memphis. "She's a natural leader and is someone who takes the initiative."

That's an important trait for someone determined to make a living playing classical music, a career that requires entrepreneurial savvy. This summer, Hall-Tompkins signed on as a soloist to the roster of Columbia Artists Management, opening up new performing possibilities.

Initiative can also be key when it comes to finding the best instruments. For three years, Hall-Tompkins played a prized 17th-century Stradivarius on loan from a private collection. Made available through the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, the instrument was rotated to another player whose turn with the violin had arrived. By late June, Hall-Tompkins had found another classic violin with equal nuance and complexity, but was still seeking private supporters to keep the instrument. "This violin has a great sound," she says. "And I'd really like to make it my own."

She hones her own playing sound by keeping in touch with Charles Castleman, a professor of violin at Eastman, who has mentored her since her graduation in 1993. "He has a very developed sense of the mechanics of violin playing, and he can perceive what you are doing, and translate it into words," she says. "He has an incredible way of enhancing your natural style."

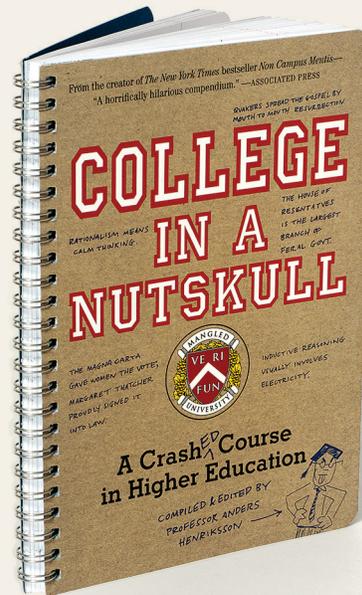
Her style has made Hall-Tompkins one of the most sought-after violinists in New York and one who's known for sharing that talent with those who might ordinarily not get to hear such music.

"Music reaches the core of our being," she says. "It can play a vital role in nourishing love, hope, and strength, particularly when played at an extremely high artistic level, and performed in a friendly, relaxed setting." 

David McKay Wilson is a New York-based freelance writer.

Who Was 'Too Loose Latreck'?

From the best students, professors can learn. From the most hapless ones, they can get a laugh. **Anders Henriksson '71**, a professor of history at Shepherd University in West Virginia, reads some pretty funny things on student exams and papers, and so do his colleagues, in virtually every discipline and in universities across the country. Now we can all share in the fun, with *College In A Nutskull: A Crash Course in Higher Education* (Workman, 2010), Henriksson's second edited collection of student bloopers. According to Henriksson, each blooper has been lifted directly from exams and term papers written by actual (albeit anonymous) "unwitting student collaborators." We offer a few highlights:



What you never knew about philosophy:

"A priori knowledge is things that you have already prioritized."

New discoveries in art history:

"Too Loose Latreck could be found at work in cafes and brasseries throughout Paris."

The lives of literary greats:

"Keats frequently downloaded his emotions on an unsuspecting public."

Know much about history?:

"Thomas Paine thought the problem with monarchy was that it tended to rely too much on having a king."

A stab in the dark:

"The Civil Rights Act of 1964 gave equal rights to civilians."

Another stab in the dark (and a favorite of Henriksson's):

"Pontious Pilot was an official in the Roman Air Force."

A bit of B.S.:

"The Dawes Plan let Germany pay its debts excrementally."

Free association:

"Hamas is an Isrealy leader who refuses to remove his sediments from the bank."

And in other malapropisms . . .

"The only career option other than peasant was often beggar or village idiot. Some, however, went to town and became gelded craftsmen."

And what was not covered on our Chaucer quiz (See page 14):

"Even today a few people have heard of Chaucer. It is, however, a little known fact that he did not know a word of English. *Canterbury Tales* is about pilgrims on their way to Thanksgiving. This was Chaucer's seminole work."

Excerpted from College in a Nutskull (Workman Publishing Co., 2010).

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