

Curtis in Italy

Students, recent graduates, and faculty perform at the garden of late composer William Walton



COMPOSER WILLIAM WALTON and his wife, Susana, created *Giardini La Mortella* — an extensive garden including fountains and Mediterranean and tropical plants, trees, and shrubs — on the hill of Zaro on the Italian island of Ischia. They began in the 1950's, and work continued long after Walton's death in 1983.

Today it is a center for both horticulture and music, as the Walton Trust and the *Fondazione William Walton e la Mortella* have established a place for research, performance, and enjoyment. The foundation's objectives include opening a study center for gifted young musicians under the guidance of the world's leading teachers and establishing a center of excellence in the performing arts, with special reference to Walton's music.

Curtis entered this garden landscape for a European performance and teaching trip in May, when four students, two recent graduates, and two faculty arrived at *La Mortella*. (Pictures of the gardens may be viewed at www.lamortella.it.) Pianist Roman Rabinovich, baritone James J. Kee, and the *Vertigo String Quartet* — violinists Johannes Dickbauer and José Maria Blumenschein, violist Lily Francis, and cellist Nicholas Canellakis — performed varied programs in recitals over two weekends. Faculty member and pianist Mikael Eliassen appeared in recital with Mr. Kee, and faculty member and then-president-designate Roberto Díaz led a master class on Walton's *Viola Concerto*.

"The Curtis Institute of Music hopes that this is the beginning of a long musical relationship with *La Mortella* and Europe," said Robert Fitzpatrick, Curtis's dean, who helped to coordinate the performances. "Our arrival at *La Mortella* on May 17 was the start of an odyssey colored by the remarkable hospitality of Lady Walton and her head gardener, Alessandra Vinciguerra. We lunched with them almost every day and traded anecdotes, especially about Lady Walton's beloved William and their life together. Our home for almost two weeks



was her guest house, *La Foresteria*, with a magnificent swimming pool and breathtaking views of the Mediterranean."

The *Vertigo String Quartet* (whose name the Italians pronounced "Vairrrr-TEE-go," complete with rolled "r") played a Walton quartet, as well as works by Mozart and Brahms. It also performed Beethoven's *Op. 131*, the work at the heart of Michael Hollinger's play *Opus*; the *Vertigo Quartet* provided the soundtrack for the world premiere at Philadelphia's *Arden Theatre Company* earlier in the year. (The quartet was then called the *Addison*.)

The quartet members also performed solo works, accompanied by Mr. Rabinovich. Among the pieces performed by Mr. Kee were Samuel Barber's *Dover Beach*, *Despite and Still*, and *Three Songs on Poems of James Joyce*.

"The music room, or concert hall, was open to the public even during our rehearsals," the dean said, "and everyone seemed to enjoy the interaction between the casually dressed musicians and the even more casually clad tourists (mostly German).

"Curtis students and faculty look forward to next year's Ischian adventure." ☺



(Top, from left) Johannes Dickbauer, Lily Francis, José Maria Blumenschein, Roman Rabinovich, Nicholas Canellakis, and Lady Walton at lunch
~ PHOTO: BOB FITZPATRICK

Lily Francis of the *Vertigo String Quartet* in *La Mortella's* music room ~ PHOTO: DMITRY TERESCHENKO