



EMANUEL AX AND KELLY HALL-TOMPKINS AT THE OLIVIERI CENTER FOR WOMEN

Someone's in the Kitchen

The idea emerged gradually. Before performing a work in public, violinist Kelly Hall-Tompkins has always liked to play it through for colleagues. But in February 2004, as she was preparing for a concerto appearance with the Greenville (South Carolina) Symphony, her husband, percussionist Joe Tompkins, came up with another idea. Tompkins works as coordinator of the cooks at the men's shelter at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Manhattan; he suggested that she try performing the music for the shelter residents.

While Hall-Tompkins played her program—Mozart's Violin Concerto no. 4 and an encore of Kreisler's *Recitative and Scherzo*—some of the residents went on about

their business. But others stopped and listened, evidently engaged by what they were hearing. It was enough of response to plant a thought in her head. A year later, in March 2005, that idea bore fruit in **Music Kitchen/Food for the Soul**, a regular series of concerts in which accomplished classical musicians play for homeless people. "This isn't an *underserved* audience," says Hall-Tompkins. "It's a completely *non-served* audience."

The concerts take place at Holy Trinity Lutheran, as well as at the Olivieri Center, a shelter for women. Hall-Tompkins has drawn on friends and colleagues to create a pool of participating musicians. Sometimes the performers find themselves engaged in extra-musical activities—as at the very first concert, when the volunteer cooks didn't show up at the shelter, obliging the musicians to whip up a spaghetti dinner before they sat down to Brahms and Mozart.

Some of the performers—Emanuel Ax, for example—have come from outside of Hall-Tompkins's immediate circle. She approached the pianist during a break at a New Jersey Symphony rehearsal (she's in the violin section); and when she told him about her project, he volunteered to perform. She managed to get Steinway to donate a piano for the day to the Olivieri Center and treated the residents to a program of Beethoven's Violin Sonata no. 1 and the Brahms B-Major Piano Trio, both with Ax. "I went around before the performance telling people, 'Believe it or not, there's going to be a piano right here—and a world-famous pianist to play it!'" says Hall-Tompkins. "They couldn't believe it. It was a glorious day."

Although some in the Music Kitchen's audience members are newcomers to classical music, others bring a lifetime of awareness to the concerts. "Homelessness has no prerequisite: These people can come from all walks of life," says Hall-Tompkins. "We've played for people who come from careers in international business and universities, and they find themselves now to be homeless. One woman said she had worked for the Boston Symphony. I found that particularly poignant."

Hall-Tompkins talks about her "BHAGs"—her "Big Hairy Audacious Goals." One is to get a corporate sponsor to help her expand Music Kitchen/Food for the Soul's activities and repertoire. Another goal is more personal: "My BHAG is that homeless people would be so familiar with this music that they would feel totally comfortable attending a free concert alongside other patrons," she says. "What if these people could come to Carnegie Hall and not feel out of place and ashamed, but have a real personal stake in what's going on there?"

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