

Norfolk

CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
YALE SUMMER SCHOOL OF MUSIC

PAUL HAWKSHAW, DIRECTOR

A CENTURY OF MUSIC IN THE SHED, 1906-2006

— Ariana Falk

A Family Affair

The story of the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival begins, as do so many great stories, with family history. Two remarkable Norfolk families, both linked to Yale and both passionate about music, came together to make Norfolk the first musical center of its kind in New England.

The story begins with the twenty-one-year-old Reverend Ammi Ruhamah Robbins, a Yale College graduate, who arrived in Norfolk in 1761 to be the first pastor of the Church. A year later, he married Elizabeth Le Baron of Plymouth, and she moved to live with him in the tiny settlement. The hills were densely forested at the time, and the roads primitive, so travel and communication were rare luxuries for the settlers. The family made its own wool and linen, but there was no cotton, and the first mail-rider through Norfolk didn't appear until 1789. The post horses were changed on the four-horse stage line between Hartford and Albany at the top of the hill in Norfolk.

The Robbins' daughter, Sarah, married Joseph Battell, who built the square Battell mansion, Whitehouse, next to the Norfolk Village Green in 1799. The Battells had nine children of their own and raised a niece as well. The family began a great legacy of supporting music at Yale. They were, in fact, the sole supporters of music at Yale for most of the 19th century.

The Battells hosted musical soirées at their home as early as the 1820s. Irene Battell Larned established the first endowment at Yale in the field of music, and her brothers and sisters contributed generously. Soon after, their brother Joseph Battell sponsored the construction of Battell Chapel at Yale, which remains among the University's most beautiful landmarks and concert spaces.

Thanks in large part to the Battell family, 19th-century Litchfield County was steeped in music like no other rural area in New England. Robbins Battell, the seventh child, graduated from Yale in 1839, and although he managed the family business affairs, his passion was for the musical life of Norfolk. He created a singing school and was an expert flutist. He also conducted many concerts of the Litchfield County Musical Association in Norfolk and Winsted, including a major performance of the Hallelujah chorus to celebrate the centennial of the county in 1851. In the 1880s, he sponsored a concert series on the Village Green. He was also a skilled composer and arranger who composed hymns and set a great deal of poetry to music, including many Negro spirituals. An expert on church bells, it was he who donated the chimes to the Congregational Church and composed the tune that still marks the hours for the town of Norfolk.

Robbins Battell's daughter, Ellen, was born in 1851 and, as an only child, she was quickly caught up in the passion for music that captivated her father. She loved voice and piano as a child, and as she grew older, she played the organ for the Norfolk church and followed the musical scene in New York City. Ellen and her father traveled frequently to Europe to add to their collection of art. They were accompanied often by her father's secretary, Carl Stoeckel, who was the son of Gustave Stoeckel.

Gustave Stoeckel was a German musician who had studied composition and worked as an organist in Bavaria. When he arrived in America, he found his way to New Haven and met Irene Battell Larned, a sister of Robbins Battell. She recognized his extraordinary ability and qualifications. European-trained classical musicians were rare gems in Connecticut in those days. Before long, he became the first Professor of Music at Yale and the first person to receive a Doctor of Music degree from the University. He directed the Yale Choir and Glee Club and composed orchestral works as well as six complete operas in his spare time. When he retired, it was to Elmslea, his home in Norfolk, where he spent the last years of his life. Ellen fell in love with his son Carl, but her father didn't approve of the relationship, so it went no further until Robbins Battell died in 1895. That same year, Carl and Ellen married. Together they would create one of the greatest musical legacies in the history of this country.

The Music Shed is Born

Mr. & Mrs. Stoeckel decided to honor Ellen's father by founding a local musical society that would bring a cascade of musical excellence to their town. Choral and musical societies already blossomed around the region. Every town had a club and a quorum of musicians. Mrs. Stoeckel had long hosted informal evenings in her home, first in Whitehouse and later in the church. A great musical Festival in Norfolk would provide a natural center for a region steeped in music.

After the Litchfield County Choral Union came into being in 1899, the concerts became more and more popular and came to be known collectively as the Norfolk Festival. It soon became the first internationally known music Festival of its kind in America and inspired the array of music centers that have since appeared across the Berkshires. The founders dedicated the Festival to "presenting to the people of Litchfield County choral and orchestral music in the highest forms." As a gift to their community, the Stoeckels assumed the entire expense of the concerts.

The Stoeckels invited musical societies from the surrounding towns to join the Union, and clubs from Norfolk, Winsted, Salisbury, Canaan and Torrington convened for the new musical alliance. In all, more than seven hundred musicians joined the forces of the group. Two conductors served the Union during most of its existence: Richmond P. Paine for choral works and Arthur Mees for orchestral works. During the winter, the local clubs rehearsed the choral works separately. The Stoeckels paid the conductor to travel from town to town to direct the rehearsals.

After five years of concerts in Winsted and at makeshift halls at the Estate, the Stoeckels decided to build a hall worthy of truly great music. A New York architect, E.K. Rossiter, designed the building on the Estate, and the Music Shed opened on June 6, 1906. The Shed is built of cedar and lined with California redwood, which likely accounts for its brilliant acoustics and certainly for its rustic beauty. The original hall seated 700

audience members, but after several expansions it was enlarged to hold 2,100. (Fire regulations have since reduced its capacity back to 900.) At the Shed's inaugural concert, the great American soprano Lillian Nordica sang "Dich, theure Halle," the glorious paean to the hall of song from Wagner's opera, *Tannhäuser*.

At first, the rule was that 50 cents and no more should be charged for tickets, so that the price would be prohibitive to no one. To the displeasure of the Stoeckels, enterprising audience members began to sell their tickets to the highest bidders. To preserve the wholly non-commercial quality of their Festival, the Stoeckels stipulated that attendance would be by invitation only. There was not one cent of income from the concerts; every one of the attendees was an invited guest of Mr. and Mrs. Stoeckel.

Movie stars, politicians, and all the preeminent musicians of the East Coast would receive the following invitation:

The Litchfield County Choral Union requests the honour of your presence at the eighth meeting and concert on the evening of Tuesday, the fourth of June at quarter before eight o'clock in the Music Shed, Norfolk, CT. This invitation is not transferable, and if sold, or presented by any person other than the one whose name it bears, it will be refused at the door and forfeited. The Union reserves the right to eject from the hall any person who may have entered by an invitation which has been sold.

Audiences began to clamor for invitations from all over New England and as far away as Texas, Chicago and California, and within five years they could easily have filled a building many times as large. The Music Shed had begun its reign among the premiere concert halls in New England.

Mr. and Mrs. Stoeckel spared no expense in making the Festival concerts extravagant musical events. They recruited a 70-piece orchestra of players from the Philharmonic and Metropolitan Opera orchestras in New York, and paid for a special train to transport the instrumentalists through the Litchfield hills. The appointments were eagerly sought; apart from the honor, the musicians had the pleasure of spending a week in the mountains, and the lawn parties that spread across the Estate after rehearsals were famous.

The repertoire included major works for chorus and orchestra as well as pieces for the orchestra alone. A typical Festival might have included Gounod's *Redemption* one night, Tchaikovsky's sixth symphony the next, and a recital by the soloists on a third day. The vocal soloists were the preeminent singers of their time: Emma Eames, Louise Homer, Frieda Hempel, Alma Gluck, and countless more. The instrumental soloists were just as renowned: the violinists Fritz Kreisler and Maude Powell and pianist Sergei Rachmaninoff all drew throngs to the Shed.

Specially-hired trains would bring audiences to the concerts from Winsted, Torrington, Litchfield and Hartford. (The Torrington train often had trouble climbing the hill to Norfolk, so the Winsted train would push it to the summit.) No cars were allowed in the two rustic roads leading through the Whitehouse grounds to the Music Shed, and the only carriages allowed were those containing the artists. The cars that did arrive were directed to parking spots by special constables, and their occupants would walk perhaps a quarter of a mile through shaded park paths lighted by torches. In the soft twilight, the immaculately dressed guests would wend their way down the winding paths of the Estate to prepare for the feast of music.

The colossal chorus – as many as 420 singers – would settle around the stage in the amphitheatre, the women wearing white dresses striped with diagonal ribbons of red and blue. By tradition, composers wore red flowers and poets white flowers in their breast pockets. On some nights, the program would begin with a chorale by Robbins Battell, Mrs. Stoeckel's father. Neither Carl Stoeckel nor Mrs. Stoeckel appeared publicly during the concerts. Mrs. Stoeckel occupied a hidden box above the stage, while Mr. Stoeckel entered casually to stand at the side of the hall after the program had begun.

The crowd spilled over to the outside, where more lanterns and torches lit the grounds, lights swathed the trees and mingled with the lilacs and azaleas, and people watched and listened through the open doors. As many as three thousand audience members settled in irregular lines outside the shed on the rocks called "the ledge." Some would bring small electric lamps in order to follow their scores during the performance. This outside gathering was even quieter than the one inside. When the weather was good, many in fact preferred outside seats.

The town of Norfolk bubbled with life during the Festival. For those four days, 10,000 visitors would pour into a village with a total population of 1,500. The hundred-odd professional musicians who took part strolled the streets and walked through the hills gathering plants and flowers. Frederick Landau, the concertmaster, organized a popular fishing expedition every year. Each afternoon, after morning orchestra and solo rehearsals, the Stoeckels held lawn parties for the performers. Those famous parties even inspired a new piece of music: the Choral Union performed the premiere of Nicolò Laucella's "Symphonic Impressions of Whitehouse" in 1919.

New Music

From the early days of the Festival, Mr. and Mrs. Stoeckel were devoted to the contemporary music of their time. The Litchfield County Choral Union had promised in its dedication to "honor the composer and his work, under the most elevated conditions," and the Festival lived up to that promise at the highest level. They commissioned new works and sponsored composers' visits to the Festival to conduct their own premieres.

In 1906, Carl Stoeckel offered \$1000 for an orchestral composition to be played by the Litchfield County Choral Union, "the theme to embody some idea suggestive of the enterprising Connecticut county which is doing so much musically." The composition had to be written especially for this occasion, and the composer had to be a resident of the United States. This began a great tradition of sponsoring new works; by 1918, the summer Festivals in Norfolk had sponsored and premiered 30 new large-scale orchestral works by many of the great American composers of the era.

An appreciative reviewer in the Waterbury Republican-American wrote:

Mr. Stoeckel's idea apparently is to encourage American composers to let themselves go till they release themselves from constraint and do not find when they take flight on the wings of inspiration that they have been simply floating on pinions of other genius borrowed unconsciously from memory. Genius will generally reveal itself, but in the fields of higher composition it must be encouraged, tempted, discovered, rewarded.

The composers who wrote for the Litchfield County Choral Union were the most respected American composers of their time: Percy Grainger, Henry Hadley, David Stanley Smith, Edgar Stillman Kelley, Horatio Parker, and many more.

Distinguished Guests

It wasn't only American composers who spent time at Norfolk. Mr. and Mrs. Stoeckel were conscious from the outset that Europeans had much to offer their musical venture. The French composer Camille Saint-Saëns was an honorary member of the Choral Union when it formed, and it was he who recommended some of the repertoire the group sang during its first years, including Gounod's *Redemption*. The great Finnish composer Jean Sibelius, Max Bruch, Vaughan Williams and Sergei Rachmaninoff are just a few of the others who visited Norfolk during the next two decades.

As early as 1910, Mr. and Mrs. Stoeckel arranged to have the eminent British-African composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor transported from London to America to conduct one of his own premieres, and he wrote several major works for the Festival over the next decade.

Mr. Coleridge-Taylor wrote many pieces that alluded to African spiritual tunes, including "The Bamboula Dance" in 1910 and "Negro Air" in 1912. Ellen Stoeckel's father, Robbins Battell, had arranged several Negro spiritual tunes himself while he was alive. One day, Ellen was playing one of those melodies on the piano in Whitehouse when Mr. Coleridge-Taylor was visiting. The composer stopped fast and listened to the whole melody, rapt.

"That's one of the most beautiful melodies I've ever heard," he exclaimed when she finished. "I think I could write a violin concerto on that theme." And though he didn't use it for the theme of his violin concerto, after all, the tune did appear in a work he wrote not long afterwards in England.

Jean Sibelius made his single voyage to the United States in June of 1914 at the invitation of the Stoeckels. He spent a month at Norfolk and conducted the world premiere of his tone poem, *Aallottaret (Nymphs of the Ocean)*, in the Music Shed, as well as an entire program of his music – *Finlandia*, *Suite King Christian II*, *The Swan of Tuonela*, and others. In his biography of Sibelius, Karl Ekman writes that the composer said the orchestra at Norfolk was the best he ever conducted. The Stoeckels asked him what he would like to see in America during his visit, and he replied, "Niagara Falls, an American Indian, and a thunderstorm." His hosts fulfilled his wishes by taking him to the great waterfall and to an Indian reservation, and the Litchfield hills obliged his third request. The natural beauty of the hills – which he dubbed "Leatherstocking country" – captivated the composer, though he was ill equipped for the climate. When he disembarked in New York, he was wearing his woolens and his overcoat. Mrs. Stoeckel recalled that her first service to her guest was taking him to a clothing store where he could buy a suitable outfit for the New England summer.

In 1920, Sergei Rachmaninoff visited Norfolk – not for a premiere but to perform his own second piano concerto, as well as to conduct his tone poem, "Isle of the Dead." He, too, was delighted with the scenery and air of Litchfield County, which he compared to certain parts of Switzerland. He spoke French fluently but knew little English, so his 12-year-old daughter, who had studied English in school, acted as his interpreter. Since his contract stipulated that he be provided with a Steinway piano for his performances, Steinway & Sons sent a fine concert grand. The great pianist's performance at Norfolk was heralded far and wide, and his piano continues to be used to this day.

The War Years

In 1918, Mr. and Mrs. Stoeckel opted to hold the Festival despite the war, although they imbued the concerts with a special spirit of patriotism. One of the programs consisted entirely of new works by American composers, including a patriotic ode by George Chadwick, the "American Symphony" of David Stanley Smith, and a work called "The Red Cross Spirit Speaks" by Horatio Parker. "It was surely a wise decision not to give up the Norfolk Music Festival this year because of war conditions," observed a writer from the Litchfield Enquirer. "To the hundreds who traveled to the Music Shed Tuesday evening, the horrors of war were not less terrible, but they were given new hope and a more determined spirit to endure to the end by the wonderful music and the intense spirit of devotion to country." The program also included a performance of Verdi's *Requiem* in honor of the dead, with the eminent singers Florence Hinkle, Sophie Breslau, Lambert Murphy and Herbert Witherspoon as soloists. To close the Festival, the entire crowd rose to join the chorus in the song "America." Attendees declared the concerts to be the most striking exposition of American music ever given, and attendance inside and outside was over 10,000.

In the fall of that year, Mr. and Mrs. Stoeckel invited the *Garde Républicque*, the French army band consisting of 70 war veterans, to stay and perform on the Estate as a symbol of the cordial feelings between France and the United States. Finally, in 1919, the Stoeckels celebrated with a "Festival of the Allies," featuring music composed by natives of England, France, Belgium, Italy and America.

A Gift to Last

The elaborate annual Festivals ended when Carl died in 1925, but Mrs. Stoeckel continued to sponsor Sunday evening concerts, when the audience sang, and annual concerts of the Choral Union. A large-scale concert of hymns often rounded out the summer.

Ellen Battell Stoeckel died on May 5, 1939, at the age of 88, after a remarkable tradition of music-making on her Norfolk Estate. Her last wish was that this tradition should continue and, after 85 years of her family's generosity to music at Yale, the University was an apt beneficiary. Her will contained instructions that the bulk of her estate be used "for the benefit and development of the School of Music of Yale University and for extending said University's courses in music, art, and literature." Three Trustees were appointed: Ellen Stoeckel's brother-in-law, Robbins Battell Stoeckel, Arthur P. Day, and Clemens Scott, of the Hartford-Connecticut Trust Company. The buildings on the picturesque 60-acre Estate included the elegant Whitehouse manor, the 1,200-seat Music Shed, the brick stable in which her father housed his prize-winning Arabian horses, Battell House and Eldridge Barn. She also left nearly \$2 million in financial assets to support the music school. Her will stipulated that, if Yale failed to carry out its terms to the satisfaction of the Trustees, the Trust could transfer the gift to another educational institution.

A School Takes Shape

In November, 1939, Yale School of Music Dean, David Stanley Smith, went to Norfolk to inspect the Estate. Only a few days earlier, he had seen the plans for that *other* music Festival that the Boston Symphony would create at Tanglewood and suggested that Yale should do something different. Professor Bruce Simonds, a pianist with an international reputation and Dean of the Yale School of Music from 1941 to 1954, was asked to prepare plans for a summer music school that would be held on Mrs. Stoeckel's Norfolk Estate. The trustees and the University approved his plans, and he became Director of the new school known as The Norfolk Music School of Yale University. He remained Director for 19 years.

Before any school could open on the grounds, the facilities needed major renovations. The barn, the horse stable and the Greenhouse, all dating from the nineteenth century, were turned into practice rooms, and Battell House (formerly the Eldridge family home) became administrative offices, a recital hall, and a dining hall. Whitehouse remained intact; its 35 rooms came to serve as a residence for the Director and guest artists.

The Norfolk Music School opened in 1941 for a six-week session. The Norfolk School of Art opened in 1946. Music students took lessons with faculty drawn primarily from Yale and attended lectures on music history, fine arts and literature. There were madrigal contests, folk dancing, choral singing, and play readings. In the early years, the number of students ranged from 38 to 90. They were old and young, some serious professionals and some raw amateurs. As today, the students lived with host families in town and ate their meals at the Estate.

The Norfolk Festival was reborn with weekly concerts by the faculty and guest artists in Battell House, not in the Music Shed. In the early years of the School, the Shed was used only for organ lessons and for an annual concert by the Litchfield County Choral Union. The School was an immediate success, and no advertising was needed to recruit students.

A member of the Faculty to this day, pianist Claude Frank recalls his first experience as a student at Norfolk sixty years ago. "It was 1946," he says. "I had just gotten out of the army, and many people told me that, as a pianist, I should go to Yale; so I decided to visit Norfolk." Mr. Frank recalls hearing the sound of a violin emanating from a "wooden shack, which is what they had in those days." He approached the player and interrupted him ("I had just got out of the army and thought I could do anything in those days," he recalls). The violinist turned out to be Hugo Kortschak, the world-famous Austrian-American head of the violin department of Yale until 1952.

The Yale Summer School of Music and Art

While Yale provided most of the faculty, students, dining services and library materials, at the outset the Norfolk Music School did not offer academic credit, and there were no minimum audition requirements. In 1958, the Trustees of the Ellen Battell Stoeckel Estate and Yale University agreed that it was time for a new structure for the Norfolk School. It was renamed the Yale Summer School of Music and Art with two separate divisions. Literature was officially dropped from the summer curriculum, and the music and art programs began to run concurrently for an eight-week session. Most importantly, the new Summer School began to offer academic credit. All students admitted to the new programs received fellowships to cover the cost of tuition, room, and board – at that time a highly unusual policy for any summer program.

Keith Wilson, a clarinetist from the Yale School of Music Faculty in New Haven, who had also taught at Norfolk since 1951, became the new Director of the Music Division. He would stand at the helm for twenty-three years. The Music Shed came back into regular use. Every Friday night, a chamber orchestra with faculty and guest artists gave concerts.

Admission to the summer school now required the same high performance ability requisite for the Yale School of Music. The students presented twenty chamber music programs and two or three chamber operas every summer. Students came from all over the country and as many as twenty-five different institutions to enroll in the newly invigorated Summer School. In addition to daily coachings on the standard chamber music repertoire, they studied contemporary music, continuing the tradition of new music performance that Mr. and Mrs. Stoeckel had begun in the early Norfolk Music Festivals. The first summer of the new program, the students performed the chamber opera *Sarah* by Ezra Laderman who later became Dean of the School of Music.

Many of the great performers of the 1960s and 70s came to Norfolk as faculty and guest artists including the Guarneri and Yale String Quartets. The latter was a dazzling but ephemeral group comprised of performers on the Yale School of Music faculty: violinists Broadus Erle and Syoko Aki, violist David Schwartz, and cellist Aldo Parisot. The group formed in 1966, and though it lasted less than a decade, received the highest critical acclaim. In 1970, the Director of Vanguard Records heard the quartet play Beethoven's Op. 132 at Norfolk and, at the Whitehouse reception after the concert, agreed to record all the late Beethoven String Quartets with the group. Made in the course of one long week, that recording that is still regarded as one of the finest ever made of this repertoire.

The School Evolves

During the 1970s, Keith Wilson curbed the academic courses and orchestral concerts in order to focus solely on the performance of chamber music. Students separated into string quartets and woodwind and brass quintets. In addition, the first two weeks of the eight-week session became a seminar in which students would steep themselves in a repertoire such as the Haydn String Quartets or French Art Song. The school became even more focused and professional, and the concerts more visible. The Music Shed was refurbished, and the Festival became known as the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival.

In the fall of 1981, Joan Panetti, Professor Adjunct at the Yale School of Music and a renowned pianist and composer, became the new Director of the Yale Summer School of Music. She remained in the post for the next twenty-three years. Professor Panetti had taught, performed and composed at Norfolk throughout the 70s. Like Keith Wilson, she increased the level of professionalism while maintaining a nurturing and intimate atmosphere. She pushed the School and Festival to have an international reputation – a peer of institutions like Marlboro and Ravinia that trained young professionals at the highest level.

Under Professor Panetti's leadership, the school continued to evolve. She drew her faculty mentors and performers from Yale's outstanding faculty. "Yale was the tree, and I never deviated from it," she says. "You nourish the young through believing in them and, above all, by having a

great faculty.” Panetti saw the value of having outstanding ensembles in residence. The Tokyo String Quartet was, and remains at the heart of the faculty for quartet players, and the Frankl-Pauk-Kirschbaum Trio served in the same capacity for trios. The guest artist list reads like a musical Who’s Who from each decade: the New York Woodwind Quintet, Vermeer Quartet, Annapolis Brass, and the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio are just a few of the eminent groups who taught and performed on the stage of the Music Shed at Norfolk.

In recognition of the rigors of the music profession, the school sought out more preformed young ensembles from an international pool. Many Norfolk alumni continued on to international careers. Due to the strong influence of the Tokyo Quartet, the list includes a cavalcade of string quartets: the Ying, Miró, St. Lawrence, Cavani, Shanghai, Elements, Lydian, Rosamunde, Cassatt, Calder and Biava Quartets, as well as Pamela Frank and the Eroica Trio.

The Festival won grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Chamber Music America, and Meet the Composer that recognized its special efforts to reach new audiences across the state of Connecticut. The Festival held Family Days, jazz concerts — including the virtuosic Mitchell-Ruff duo — an annual Baroque night, and a Cabaret night. On three occasions, they turned the Shed into a giant ballroom for a gala event called “Norfolk Ballroom.” The New World Jazz Orchestra performed, and the Shed filled with people who danced the night away.

Although most of the orchestra concerts that had been regular features during the previous decade disappeared, for many years student performers joined the distinguished faculty for an annual chamber orchestra concert called *Old and New*. It was an all-time high, says Joan Panetti. It captured the best parts of the Festival – the highest quality and the greatest intimacy.

Still Like New

Ellen Battell Stoeckel’s dedication to new music continues with a New Music Workshop devoted to world premieres of works by young composers. The workshop grew out of the two-week seminars that traditionally began the Festival, and under composers such as Martin Bresnick and Joan Tower, it has become one of Norfolk’s most distinguished features. The Festival continues to commission new works and sponsor residencies for performers of modern music; Speculum Musicae, Bang on a Can, Ransom Wilson, Robert Van Sice and Susan Narucki have served as Faculty mentors. So Percussion, eighth blackbird, and the Contrasts Quartet are a few of the internationally-known new music ensembles that had their early training at Norfolk. Many young composers who studied at Norfolk have gone on to earn top commissions and teaching positions.

Norfolk faculty artists honor the tradition of new music with the programming of new classics alongside more familiar repertoire at chamber concerts throughout the summer. Great composers of our era including Ezra Laderman, Steve Reich, George Crumb, David Lang, Michael Gordon, Jacob Druckman, Bright Sheng, Yehudi Wyner, Jennifer Higdon and Martin Bresnick have all taught and seen their works performed at Norfolk.

In 2004 musicologist and Yale School of Music Faculty member, Paul Hawkshaw, succeeded Joan Panetti as Director. Support from the Argosy Foundation, the Connecticut Commission for Tourism and Culture and the Blue Hill Troupe have allowed the Festival to continue to foster new music and to cultivate its international tradition of chamber music, as well as to bring more vocal music into the repertoire. Professor Hawkshaw has been particularly committed to expanding the presence of the Festival in the local community. With the help of the Battell Stoeckel Associates, the Saturday morning student concerts have become a favorite of local children. A winter series including concerts and workshops at the Botelle Elementary School has been initiated in conjunction with the Botelle Parent Teacher Organization and the Norfolk Library.

Ghosts in the Shed

Though Ellen Stoeckel died nearly half a century ago, her spirit still pervades the grounds every time the Shed fills with music – but according to some, her spirit is more than a metaphor. Some longtime residents and visitors to the Estate claim they’ve seen signs that Mrs. Stoeckel’s mischievous ghost still visits her old haunt.

Aldo Parisot recalls that he often used to practice in the Music Shed when it was empty. On one occasion, he was completely alone in the Shed, so he went to the stage for a practice session. He removed his Stradivarius cello from his case, and turned his back on a percussion setup to tune his instrument. Suddenly, BOOM! BOOM! – two deafening timpani beats shattered the silence. He whirled to face the drums, but to his astonishment, he was utterly alone. No one could have hit the drums and disappeared so fast. He grabbed his cello, jumped off the front of the stage, and tore out of the Shed as fast as he could run. Outside, he ran into Joe Veronesi Sr., the longtime caretaker of the Estate. Mr. Parisot was too shaken to return to the Shed for his cello case, so Mr. Veronesi fetched it for him and told him he wasn’t the first to meet a roguish ghost on the Estate.

Ghosts or no ghosts, the spirit of Ellen Battell Stoeckel is here at the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival – in the music that spills out of practice rooms all summer long, in the audiences who drive an hour or more to lose themselves in concerts, in the composers who are inspired to create something new for Norfolk, and in the artists who work and bask in the peaceful atmosphere. Talented young musicians and their mentors come from all over the world to play together, learn from each other, and make some of the best music in the country. Most important of all, the Shed continues to be the centerpiece of the fulfillment of Ellen Battell Stoeckel’s dream to bring great music to the Norfolk community and Northwestern Connecticut.