MASTERS
of the MUSIC SCHOOL

(l-r) Susann McDonald, Violette Verdy, Menahem Pressler, David Baker, and Stanley Ritchie.

FIVE OF THE CELEBRATED ARTISTS WHO HELPED MAKE THE ***Jacobs School of Music*** AMERICA'S BEST AND BROUGHT GREAT ESTEEM TO INDIANA UNIVERSITY

By MIKE LEONARD
By SHANNON ZAHNLE

CHARLES H. WEBB, dean emeritus of Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, says there is no mystery as to how Jacobs became the world's largest school of music and one of the best.

"The single most important factor is the quality of the faculty," Webb says. "If you are an outstanding student, the foremost question in your mind is who will I study with? Who will be my mentor?"

It's been well documented that vaunted IU President and Chancellor Herman B Wells wanted to see the university develop a world-class school of music. During his presidency (1938–1962), The Metropolitan Opera helped set the stage by traveling from its home in New York City to the small Midwestern outpost of Bloomington, performing two operas annually for nearly two decades.

Webb and the current dean, Gwyn Richards, agree that the appointment of Wilfred C. Bain as dean in 1947 set the music school on its path to greatness. "When he became dean, no school in the country gave a doctorate in performance," says Webb. "He argued that people in performance needed to be able to complete their education as high as people who were seeking a Ph.D. in other fields. So a doctorate in performance became a reality."

The ability for a student to gain conservatory-quality training and take academic classes at a Research 1 university also enhanced the allure of IU.

"Bain sought faculty who knew what it was to be successful on the world's best stages. But a good performer doesn't guarantee a good teacher. When you get that combination of someone who can teach, and knows what it takes to be successful, that combination is unbeatable," Webb says.

"Sometimes, it's as much about that person's timetable as ours," Richards says. "We have the oldest average age of faculty members in the university, because a good number of them have come to us after a performance life. But we've always told them, you can still do both."

The list of musicians who have come to IU from the most prestigious symphonies, opera companies, and ensembles in the world is lengthy, and Webb and Richards throw out their names as easily as one lists family members — Josef Gingold, Margaret Harshaw, János Starker, James J. Pellerite, Thomas Beversdorf, Virginia Zeani, György Sebök, Franco Gulli, Charles Gorham, Philip Farkas, Harvey Phillips.

"It's all pretty much merit driven, which is one of the reasons why music is such an inclusive field," Richards says. "One of the things we can be fairly proud of is that we did a lot ahead of the general society."

With counsel from the Jacobs School of Music, *Bloom* chose five renowned senior faculty members to profile — pianist Menahem Pressler, ballerina Violette Verdy, violinist Stanley Ritchie, harpist Susann McDonald, and jazz musician David Baker.

"These people are path breakers. They've done it first and they've done it best, and they've brought what they do to its highest level," Richards says. "Each has been at the forefront in some seminal way. Changed the field. Changed the profession. Changed the audience. We are so fortunate to have them here, working with our students."

The most senior is Menahem Pressler, 92, who arrived in Bloomington in 1955, the same year he co-founded the legendary Beaux Arts Trio. "Menahem is the perfect example of what we call the three-legged stool: scholarship, performance, and pedagogy," notes Richards. "As Menahem has always said, 'My teaching informs my playing and my playing informs my teaching.'"

"A national treasure."

MENAHEM PRESSLER

PIANIST

IT was a wintry Christmas Eve, about a decade ago, recalls Charles Webb, dean emeritus of Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. Menahem Pressler, although Jewish, had nonetheless stopped by the Webb home to drop off a gift. He said his goodbyes and went off on his way.

Maybe 10 minutes later, Webb received a phone call. It was Pressler, on his cell phone, explaining that he had driven off Webb's driveway and was stuck in the yard. "I said, 'Well, come back into the house,' and he said he couldn't; he was next to a hill and couldn't get out of his car."

Webb went outside and helped an agitated Pressler exit his vehicle. "The first thing he said was, 'I have to practice.' I said, 'Well, let's get your car out of the ditch first,' and he said, 'Forget the car,' he had to practice. I said, 'Well, I have three pianos in the house,' and I don't think it was even five minutes later that I heard him start playing," Webb recalls. "I think that single-mindedness of purpose is one thing that separates the good from the great."

As a distinguished professor of music, Pressler, 92, has mentored a family tree of students who have gone on to prominent positions in performance and pedagogy throughout the world. His own eminence as a performer is without peer. "Menahem Pressler's joyous pianism — technically faultless, stylistically impeccable, emotionally irrepressible — is from another age and is a virtually forgotten sensibility. He is a national treasure," a reviewer lauded in the *Los Angeles Times*.

A native of Magdeburg, Germany, Pressler was 14 during Kristallnacht (November 9–10, 1938), when nationalist fanatics attacked Jewish homes, synagogues, and shops, including the Pressler family's clothing store. In 1939, his immediate family fled their homeland, first to Italy, then to Israel. His grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins were all subsequently murdered in concentration camps.

Pressler was already a promising young pianist when he left Germany, and received further confirmation of his ability, he says, when two talented musicians, a violinist and a cellist (the son of future Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir), showed up outside his family's apartment and asked if he'd like to join them in a trio. He was 16, and Pressler says the young men uttered the magic words: They'd get paid to play. But what to play? They would start with Schubert. Pressler was sold.

In 1946, still living in Israel, Pressler read about the Debussy International Piano Competition in San Francisco. With the help of a benefactor, he traveled to the United States. He says he suspected that music would be his lifelong pursuit when, with relatively little practice of Debussy music, he won first prize. "I really didn't go to win," he says. "I only went to find out, how good am I?"

(top, l-r) Menahem Pressler in his studio; the perfectionist; Pressler still practices for hours every day.

(left, top) Pressler as a young recording artist for MGM. (left, bottom) The Beaux Arts Trio's final Bloomington performance, June 28, 2008.
Photos courtesy IU Jacobs School of Music

He soon found out. His victory led to a career as a successful solo pianist, including his American debut with The Philadelphia Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, and as a recording artist with MGM Records. In 1955, Pressler co-founded a trio with two illustrious peers: violinist Daniel Guilet and cellist Bernard Greenhouse. At Guilet's insistence, the group was named the Beaux Arts Trio, honoring its French influence.

"Our debut in 1955 was at Tanglewood (then the Berkshire Music Festival) and our success was immediate. The critics couldn't say enough, especially about me," Pressler says. "We succeeded and it seemed like everything we touched turned to gold."

That same year, Pressler joined the piano faculty at IU, and to this day he continues to take on private students, teach master classes, and perform throughout the world.

Other cellists and violinists replaced the original Beaux Arts musicians over time, but Pressler remained throughout the trio's 53-year history, which ended in August 2008. The group never lost its luster, and in 2005 *The Washington Post* reported: "Since its founding 50 years ago, the Beaux Arts Trio has become the gold standard for trios throughout the world."

Pressler ascribes the group's success, and his own, to a singular philosophy: "There is always more to be found. That was my motto. It actually was the group's motto. We always felt we can do better, and we should do better."

He says there's probably no better proof of the trio's constant development and never-ending quest for excellence than the 2015 decision by Decca Records to release the group's entire recorded catalogue in an enormous 60 CD boxed set. "That's 120 records," he says with a tone of amazement. "You ask me what makes me proud. That made me proud. Of course, many, many beautiful things happened to us. And now to have this great joy of bringing out 120 records, 60 CDs? That's something."

VIOLETTE VERDY

BALLERINA

"Everybody needs to be in a room with Violette Verdy. She is like sunshine," says Patricia McBride, a former New York City Ballet dancer and IU faculty member.
Photo courtesy IU Jacobs School of Music

Ballerina and teacher Violette Verdy will forever be associated with George Balanchine, of which she is very proud.

The New York Times called Balanchine "one of the greatest choreographers in the history of ballet" upon his death in 1983, and Verdy says he was every bit as great a teacher as he was a choreographer. "He was an educator to the hilt, and that was something I so loved about him," she says.

And Verdy? "She was the muse for Balanchine. The one who sparked his creative imagination, to see her ability and translate it into an expression. She's right at the nexus of Balanchine to the audience," says Gwyn Richards, dean of Indiana University Jacobs School of Music.

From 1958 to 1977, Verdy was the principal dancer for the New York City Ballet, which Balanchine co-founded. He served as its artistic director and, as *The New York Times* described, established it as "one of the foremost artistic enterprises the United States has called its own." Verdy, 82, served as director of the Paris Opera Ballet and Boston Ballet before coming to teach at IU in 1996, where she now holds the title of distinguished professor.

"For me to be here, like this, is the crowning achievement," she says. "To be accepted at this particular university. Because universities have tons of great brains. But if the heart is not taken care of, the great brains are missing something. That's why for those of us in ballet and music, it feels so right. We complete the picture."

Verdy was born Nelly Guillerm on December 1, 1933, in Pont-l'Abbé, a Breton village in northwest France. Her father, a shopkeeper, died when she was just four months old, and her mother, a schoolteacher, enrolled her daughter in dance lessons only because neither piano nor violin proved to be vigorous enough to harness young Nelly's boundless energy and enthusiasm.

Her talent almost immediately signaled that she needed better training than she could receive in Brittany, and her mother, despite strong family opposition, shepherded 9-year-old Nelly amid World War II to German-occupied Paris. There, she says, she was lucky to study under Carlotta Zambelli, a ballerina from Milan who danced with La Scala and the Paris Opera, and then Madame Rousanne Sarkissian, an Armenian teacher with Russian training. Nelly was still in her early teens when she started touring with Roland Petit's Ballets des Champs-Elysées and his Ballets de Paris.

She'd acquired the stage name of Violette Verdy by the time the American Ballet Theatre invited her to come to New York in 1957, and was admittedly stunned when the great Russian choreographer Balanchine asked her to join his New York City Ballet.

"Balanchine was known for his love of tall, leggy, and fearless American dancers whom he had trained in his own, more dynamic, streamlined technique," dance writer Marina Harss wrote last year in *The Nation*. "With the exception of her fearlessness, [the petite] Verdy did not embody this type at all. 'I was more of a French poodle than a borzoi [large, long-haired dog]', she likes to say."

Verdy says she and Balanchine shared a deep love and understanding of music. Balanchine and composer Igor Stravinsky were friends and mutual admirers, she says, and Balanchine and Verdy worked with a deeply held belief that dance, at its finest, could be a visual manifestation of the rhythm and mood of a composition.

Verdy says she tries to teach this to her young dancers at IU and at workshops around the world. She is known as a nurturing teacher who can articulate mood and technique in ways that both educate and amuse her students. At the same time, she embraces the advice that New York City Ballet co-founder Lincoln Kirstein once gave her. "He said the perfect ballet school is a cross between a seminary and West Point," she recalls. "The discipline required is obvious. But taken at best and understood properly, ballet is also a spiritual pursuit."

"I lived in a world of fairy tale."

Verdy's hazel eyes dance when she talks about her career. "I lived in a world of fairy tale. I was in a fairy tale myself," she says.

Patricia McBride, a former New York City Ballet dancer and IU faculty member, has said, "Everybody needs to be in a room with Violette Verdy. She is like sunshine."

Among her many honors, in 2009 Verdy was awarded the title Chevalier (Knight) in France's National Order of the Legion of Honor, her native land's highest decoration.

Verdy in a lighter moment with her mentor, the great choreographer George Balanchine, and dancer Edward Villella.
Photo courtesy IU Jacobs School of Music

DAVID BAKER

JAZZMAN EXTRAORDINAIRE

Lida Baker rises in her seat and responds as though it's a quiz show question when her husband, David, is asked to name something from his career that makes him genuinely proud. "His students and how successful they've become," she says. "You can't be around this guy like I have and not know how much pride he takes in what his students have done and how he keeps up with what they are doing."

They're everywhere, playing in nightclubs and concert halls and teaching in conservatories. The names include versatile jazz and rock trumpeter Randy Brecker and Grammy-winning artists such as bassist/composer John Clayton and star contemporary jazz trumpeter Chris Botti. Shawn Pelton, a top-tier New York session man and house drummer for *Saturday Night Live* for more than two decades, says, "I feel like I wouldn't have a career if it weren't for the things David passed on to me. A day doesn't go by where I don't draw on something."

Baker can't pinpoint when he knew where his career path was headed, but it started with gaining the approval of Russell Brown, the exacting music teacher at Crispus Attucks, the historically black high school in his native Indianapolis. Under his senior photograph in the 1949 school yearbook, Baker lists his career ambition as music teacher.

A straight-A student in high school, Baker came to Indiana University in 1950, a time when black students still faced segregation in housing and at many commercial establishments. "I had every intention of being a classical musician," he says. He earned bachelor's and master's degrees and demonstrated a prodigious talent for composition as well.

But with symphonies and major ensembles still averse to hiring black musicians, Baker immersed himself in the surprisingly fertile Indianapolis jazz scene. A trombonist at the time, he played with all of the Indianapolis heavyweights and toured with Lionel Hampton, Stan Kenton, Maynard Ferguson, George Russell, and Quincy Jones. In 1962, Baker and his hometown colleague, Slide Hampton, shared *Down Beat Magazine*'s New Star Award for trombone.

Shortly afterwards, the ramifications from jaw injuries suffered in a car wreck nearly a decade before manifested themselves to the point that doctors told him he could never play a wind instrument again. He ultimately switched to cello and returned to IU to get his doctorate. And then, the pedagogy really kicked in.

"I think David really codified jazz studies in a way no one thought was possible," says Gwyn Richards, dean of IU Jacobs School of Music. "We've had faculty members take his improvisation class and walk away not knowing what to say. He can take people out of their comfort zone and make them understand music in a different way."

It's also a point of pride for Baker to note that the Jazz Studies Department at IU is known as the place where you can learn the ABCs of jazz. The acronym stands for Jamey Aebersold, a Baker student whose books and jazz camps have influenced thousands of players; Baker; and Jerry Coker, who accelerated IU's fledgling jazz program and handed it off to Baker in 1966.

Baker has performed on more than 65 recordings; written 70 books and 400 articles; and composed more than 2,000 musical works, including jazz, symphonic, and chamber pieces. Compositions include pieces commissioned by the likes of Josef Gingold, János Starker, and the New York Philharmonic. He founded, conducted, and served as artistic director for the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra, received the American Jazz Masters Award from the National Endowment for the Arts, and was named a Living Jazz Legend by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

In the foreword of Monika Herzig's 2011 biography, *David Baker: A Legacy in Music* (IU Press), Quincy Jones pays homage to his friend of more than 50 years, comparing Baker's career to his own widely known accomplishments in the recording and music production business. "I'm sure there have been many similar temptations over the years — promising more financial rewards, more artistic freedom, more public visibility — but he always chose his teaching and his students as his principal calling," Jones writes. "The choice to dedicate one's life to helping others achieve their aspirations is a mark of a truly selfless and kind person."

(top to bottom) Baker in high school at Crispus Attucks; with his old pal Quincy Jones; and in his Indiana Avenue days with guitar great Wes Montgomery. *Photos courtesy IU Jacobs School of Music*

"A truly selfless and kind person."

"Beyond a calling."

SUSANN MCDONALD

HARPIST

Susann McDonald says she was "probably about 40" when she felt comfortable with the notion that she was successful and would spend the rest of her life in music.

"Columbia Artists had just wooed me and signed me for concert management," she recalls. "I was also teaching at the University of Southern California (USC) and concertizing when the president of Juilliard called and said I was the right person to take over the harp program there. It was only at that point that I felt I'd truly arrived and this was probably what I was meant to do."

Those are surprising words from the woman who, while still in her teens, left Rock Island, Illinois, to study in Paris under the fabled harpist and teacher Henriette Renie. In 1955, at age 20, McDonald became the first American to receive the Premier Prix de Harpe from the Paris Conservatory. And just a year later, she was invited to perform — solo — for an audience of 60,000 at the Chicagoland Music Festival at Soldier Field. McDonald's mastery of her instrument has earned her accolades, including being named "one of the greatest living harpists" by the Swiss magazine *Harpa*.

McDonald started a publishing company, MusicWorks-Harp Editions, and, with fellow harpist Linda Wood Rollo, created teaching methods and arrangements that now are standard instructional materials used around the world. "Harpists previously used piano compositions, and keyboard writing doesn't use the whole range of the harp," McDonald says. "We created pieces to show off that whole range." She's also served on juries for virtually all of the world's important harp competitions.

(above) A publicity photo, circa 1957. (below) 1970 University of Southern California Harp Ensemble. *Photos courtesy IU Jacobs School of Music*

Talk to McDonald about her career and she invariably emphasizes teaching and mentoring young harpists. "I always loved teaching," she says. "I started teaching when I was in junior high school. By the time I graduated from high school, I had six or seven harpists in the Tri Cities (now called the Quad Cities) studying with me."

McDonald was splitting time between teaching at The Juilliard School in New York City and USC in Los Angeles when Dean Charles Webb of IU School of Music came calling in 1981, offering a full-time position. McDonald remembers, "I asked, 'Is it all right to keep teaching at Juilliard?' and he said, 'Okay, but you won't want to continue very long.' He was right. I went to Juilliard in '75, came here in '81, and resigned from Juilliard in '85."

"I can't say I knew that would happen, but I kind of did," Webb says. "No school in the country has six orchestras (like IU). The opportunities that gives to a harp program are immeasurable."

Just as IU Jacobs School of Music, with more than 1,600 students, is one of the world's largest, McDonald built her harp program into the world's largest and most acclaimed, with 25 students currently majoring in harp performance. Most schools have only two or three.

McDonald says serving as the artistic director of the World Harp Congress, from its inception in 1981 until 2011, probably ranks as the one accomplishment of which she's most proud. "I know the harp world is small, but they (participating harpists) all became good friends and I promoted their careers," she says. "I always felt that helping people was part of why I was here. That's anathema for most people. They don't want to promote the competition. That's what I live for, to see my students and my fellow harpists succeed."

In 1989, McDonald created the USA International Harp Competition, staged every three years in Bloomington. It is the only international harp competition held in the United States.

"I get such a lift from my students," she says. "I can be feeling tired or down, and I go to school and I totally forget what I'm doing and get so wrapped up in my students' playing and helping them plan their careers. It's beyond a calling, in a way. I have students all over the globe, literally, in the most prominent positions in their countries. And when they leave me, it's not like we don't see each other anymore."

STANLEY RITCHIE

EARLY MUSIC VIOLINIST

Indiana University Jacobs School of Music Dean Gwyn Richards says, "People think of us as a static, anachronistic institution and we're anything but. It's in motion. It's evolving. It's changing. The thing that keeps it together is the values."

Violinist Stanley Ritchie stands as a singular example of that kind of evolution, and not in a way one might expect. Trained in the classical style as a modern violinist, Ritchie has been concertmaster of the New York City Opera Orchestra, associate concertmaster of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, and first violinist of the Philadelphia String Quartet. But the work for which he is best known involves reaching back to the Baroque era and early music, exploring how the music would have been envisioned by composers such as Bach, Handel, and Vivaldi and played with the techniques and tonal qualities of the instruments used at the time (1600–1760).

With Ritchie, what was old became new. He's hailed as a pioneer of the modern early music movement in the United States, and in 2009 was awarded Early Music America's Howard Mayer Brown lifetime achievement award.

"In April 1970, I quit the Met because I never wanted to be an orchestral musician all my life," Ritchie says. He began playing in chamber ensembles in New York City and remembers telling harpsichordist Albert Fuller that he'd really like to delve more deeply into baroque music. "He said, 'You know what they're doing in Europe at the moment? They're tuning violins down half a step.' And I said, 'Why on earth would they want to do that? Yuck.' But he talked me into getting an old violin returned to its original specifications and the rest is history."

Ritchie expounds on that history in his 2012 book, *Before the Chinrest* (IU Press), which examines in detail how chinrests and shoulder rests stabilized the violin, as well as the techniques and styles that became standard for contemporary players.

"I always liken playing the baroque violin to driving a sports car. The instrument is so much lighter without the chinrest. It's lighter in terms of weight and in terms of action," he says. "Playing baroque music on a modern instrument is certainly possible, but not nearly as pleasurable or as natural. It just works. It's like the old saying, 'The right tool for the job.'"

Ritchie, 80, was born and raised in the small town of Yenda, Australia, about 350 miles west of Sydney. His father was an orchardist who also grew wine grapes and other fruits. "I was a farm kid," he says. But at age 7, a violin in a shop window in Sydney caught his attention and he expressed a desire to have one. "My parents decided, 'Well, it's cheaper than a piano,'" he recalls. The boy's first violin lessons were delivered by the only violinist in the region, a nun in a convent.

(top to bottom) **Ritchie teamed up with harpsichordist Elisabeth Wright in 1974 to form Duo Geminiani.** *Photo courtesy IU Jacobs School of Music* **Ritchie today.** *Photo by Shannon Zahnle* **Teaching a class at IU.** *Photo courtesy of IU Jacobs School Music*

What was old became new again.

"I didn't have many peers, as it were," he says. "It was kind of a sissy thing to do in the eyes of a rural society. Oh, I was picked on," he recalls with a chuckle. "I was an only child. I had red hair. I played the violin. And my name was Stanley."

And while he took his playing very seriously, he admits, "I've got to say right now I never had a burning ambition. I never thought I'd be the next (Yascha) Heifetz or anything. I just followed my nose and one thing led to another."

In 1974, Ritchie teamed up with harpsichordist Elisabeth Wright to form Duo Geminiani, and the two immediately became prominent in the rising early music field. Less than a decade later, Ritchie and Wright were invited by lutenist and musicologist Thomas Binkley to come to Bloomington, where he was establishing what would become the world-famous Early Music Institute (now the Historical Performance Institute). "We only had minimal experience as teachers when we were first hired, but now I can say I truly love teaching," Ritchie says.

Ritchie remains adept at "the tried-and-true conservatory style of playing and teaching" and describes his specialization in early music as a luxury. "It's not necessary for anybody to know how to play baroque violin for a living," he says. But, he adds with a self-deprecating grin, "If I hadn't discovered baroque violin, I might be sitting in the back of an orchestra now." ✻

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