

The Commissioners

LEVY, SWINCHOSKI AND
MOKRYNSKI



Margaret Swinchoski remembers the exact moment that **Palisades Virtuosi**—her New Jersey-based flute/clarinet/piano trio—came into being. “I was driving west on Route 4 and [pianist] Ron [Levy] called me from his cell phone—which is unusual, because he hates cell phones!” Swinchoski relates. Levy’s news: Their friend Don Mokrynski, long away as a clarinetist with a touring Broadway show, was back in the tri-state area and available. “Ron said, ‘Now that Donnie’s home, why don’t we start a chamber music group?’”

The three musicians loved the idea of working together, but there was a stumbling block: the paucity of repertoire for their unusual combination of players. The solution—commissioning. Now in its third season of public performances, the trio has included a commissioned work in every one of its concerts. This season alone features premieres by Frank Ezra Levy, Allen Shawn, Eric Ewazen and Dick Hyman. The group also recently released an Albany Records CD, *New*

American Masters, consisting of new works by Aaron Grad, Robert Manno, Dan Cooper, Richard Lane and Paul Mack Somers.

Levy is pianist for the Albany Symphony; the position has brought him into contact with a number of composers, a couple of whom he approached with commissions. The word has gotten out, and now the musicians sometimes get approached by composers interested in writing for their unorthodox ensemble. “Most of the composers really seem to have a knowledge of all three instruments, and really write for the *color* of the instruments,” says Levy.

When choosing a composer to work with, the group seeks challenging but approachable music. “I got tired of the attitude: ‘Look how smart I can write,’” says Swinchoski. “I’m looking for composers whose music I can understand and present to an audience, something we can put our *emotions* into.”

“It’s important to look for something that has appeal to an audience,” Levy adds. “We’re trying to build an audience and build a case for living, pertinent music.”

www.palisadesvirtuosi.org