

| on the isle

Still playing after all these (40) years

BY AILEEN JACOBSON
STAFF WRITER

Blanche Abram and Naomi Drucker first met each other one Friday night 40 years ago. Drucker was playing her clarinet, and Abram was in the audience at a monthly musicale called the Friday Music Club at which Long Island musicians played for one another and chatted.

"We both had young children at the time," said Abram, a professional pianist, music professor at Hofstra University, Baldwin resident and mother of four. "Rather than try to pursue our professions by traveling to out-of-town concerts, we decided to create a framework that would allow us . . . to pursue our life's work and be there on the spot for our children."

Drucker's two children and Abrams' four are now fully grown, so the women no longer have to be "on the spot." But the American Chamber Ensemble, which they co-direct, is still going strong in its 40th year.

Next Saturday, the ensemble — which now includes musicians from New York — will play its seventh annual concert at the Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall.

The program, "Mostly Schickele," features excerpts from the ensemble's newest CD, "American Chamber Ensemble Plays Peter Schickele," being released by Elysium Recordings that day. It contains more-or-less serious pieces by Schickele, creator of the supremely whimsical P.D.Q. Bach. The concert also will include a composition by former Brooklyn Philharmonic music director Lukas Foss, who is scheduled to attend, and one by Albert Tepper of Levittown, who also plans to attend. Tepper is one of the many local composers the American Chamber Ensemble has featured.

That tradition of premiering new works and often commissioning them — about 40 in all



NEWSDAY PHOTO / KEN SPENCER

Naomi Drucker, left, and Blanche Abram of the American Chamber Ensemble, which plays at Carnegie Hall next Saturday, have recorded works by Herbert Deutsch, back left, and Albert Tepper.

— continues on March 20, when the ensemble celebrates its 40th anniversary at a Hofstra University concert. It will play pieces by Mozart and Schumann that were part of its first program, at the Freeport Unitarian Church on Jan. 22, 1965, and will present the Long Island premiere of a work it co-commissioned by Benjamin Lees, a former Long Islander who now lives in California. Another founding member, violinist Carol Feuer, will return from North Carolina to join the group, as will original cellist William Grubb.

Working with a composer on a new piece is an exciting process, said Drucker, a Massapequa resident and Hofstra grad who is now on its faculty. "When we have the composer there at rehearsals, sometimes

adjustments are made. He might agree to a different tempo at our recommendation. And he's there to correct wrong notes in the copy and to make suggestions about the balance of the instruments. We get to ask him questions: What does that mean to him, what was his intention in that place, that sort of thing. What we try to do is make the music be the composer's vision of the piece."

Drucker, who handles the ensemble's grant-writing, scheduling and other practical matters, said she got her "passion for working with composers" while a Hofstra freshman. "Albert Tepper was one of my professors and the first person who ever wrote a piece of music for me."



Abram and Drucker, shown 30 years ago, are celebrating the group's 40th anniversary.

The ensemble has recorded works by Tepper, by Massapequa's Herbert Deutsch, both on 4Tay Records, and by the late Elie Siegmeister of

Great Neck. They've recorded a dozen — including Abram and Drucker's Eskimo drum.

Drucker is a clarinetist for Virtuosi Chamber and an extra for the Philharmonic band, Stanley Cipriani's principal clarinet, and she joins the ensemble at the Weill Recital Hall for a Schickele called Monocorb-flat clarinet. She finds seven other musicians, Drucker said.

Other ensembles include violinist Deborah Wornat (also frequent soloist with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra) and Deborah Wornat, a soloist with the violinist Lois M. member of the Quartet and Chris Finckel's String Quartet.

The ensemble's pianist is Marilyn Lehman of Denville, a former student who is now at Hofstra and has ties. She's been about 25 years a student, I turner at on learning their. Though the g at the National in Washington locales, "I think proud of our connections. V Island, to Long ence, and we composers."

Weill Recital Hall, Manhattan 2 p.m., \$35, Call 212-247-7800 or hall.org.

Hofstra University Lecture Center instead, March 2 seniors and non-students), 516-463-

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