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After Longy-Bard merger, a music school peers into its future

September 12, 2011 | By Jeremy Eichler, Globe Staff

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CAMBRIDGE - Big plans are afoot at a small music school.

In June, the Longy School of Music officially merged with Bard College. Over the last year, merger news competed with headlines generated by the school's battle with its own faculty members that had been laid off as part of a pre-merger restructuring. As that conflict seems to be receding, Longy and Bard have grown more public in discussing their new relationship.

As a kind of symbolic opening to the new chapter, the school's annual fall concert series, SeptemberFest, began on Friday night with Karen Zorn and Leon Botstein, the presidents of Longy and Bard respectively, on the stage of Pickman Concert Hall, speaking with the Boston Phoenix's classical music editor Lloyd Schwartz about joint institutional ambitions, and about the future of music education more broadly.

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With Bard's main campus located in the New York's Hudson Valley, this will be a long-distance relationship between the two schools, but probably more important than geographic closeness is the proximity of approach. Both schools seem to have an enlarged vision for what training musicians of the future might look like, Bard with its conservatory that emphasizes music's connection to the other liberal arts, and Longy, with its focus on connecting musicians with the communities in which they live. "Music can no longer be taught as an athletic or self-referential exercise," Botstein said on Friday, with the ring of a shared declaration.

The most hopeful elements of the panel discussion in fact centered on redefining the role of the music teacher. Both Botstein and Zorn seemed to recognize the excessively wide gap between careers in music education and performance, between those who teach music and those who make it. Longy will now develop a master of arts in teaching based on a newer, more holistic model of the performer-educator. On another hopeful note, Botstein and Zorn also said Longy and Bard would be exploring plans for an additional masters program, possibly offered over three summers, in which performance training was mixed with curatorial studies in history and criticism, aiming to create musicians who can think and talk about music - and program it - as capably as they play it.

Many of Longy's new offerings are still under development, but one unexpected program has already hit the ground. Zorn said on Friday that Longy, as of last month, has been running an El Sistema-inspired nucleo on the campus of a Bard-backed charter school in the city of Delano, Calif. The newly launched music program at Paramount Bard Academy is designed to teach mariachi music to local children, many of whom come from families working in the region's farming industries.

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Closer to home, beyond Longy's popular community programs (which school leaders say will continue), how will the merger affect Longy's place in the greater Boston musical ecosystem? It's too early to know, but one hopes that the school's public concert offerings, too, can be fruitfully reimagined. Longy had a smart idea with the five-concert SeptemberFest, which occupies an otherwise quiet stretch between the end of the summer season and the beginning of the fall concert rush. Friday's opening night performance, however, was a curiously unfocused program that rambled from the baroque to new music (an attractive new piece by John Morrison) to extended saxophone technique to a smattering of pieces by John Cage and a quartet by Haydn.

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It was hard to avoid thinking about potential new directions for this annual festival, especially given the merger. For years at Bard, Botstein and colleagues have convened an annual summer festival with some of the most intellectually engaging programming around. Why not carve out a niche for Bard Festival-style public events at Longy? With all of Boston's local universities, it's hard to imagine a place more potentially receptive to the programming approach Botstein has championed at Bard and at the American Symphony Orchestra, which he also directs.

In the meantime, Longy's fall concert calendar is not exactly free of surprises. One of them is a recital on Oct. 10 with violinist luminary Gidon Kremer performing Bach, Shostakovich, and contemporary works with two colleagues - a coup for a small school. After Kremer in Pickman Hall and mariachi in California, what will come next for Longy? It's hard to guess, and that, for starters, is a good thing.

Much of the ultimate success or failure of Longy's plans will of course depend on how they are realized, and whether the school can preserve the essential elements of its older identity while making room for bold changes. But after years of being overshadowed by Boston's other music schools, it's clearly a wise move for Longy to be raising its ambitions and reaching toward a broader context for its own future.

Jeremy Eichler can be reached at jeichler@globe.com.

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Bard College Press Release

[\[close this window \]](#)**Bard College and the Longy School of Music to Merge****Institutions celebrate partnership that will change the landscape of music education and performance in the United States**

Mark Primoff
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06-14-2011

CAMBRIDGE, MA—Longy School of Music President Karen Zorn and Bard College President Leon Botstein announced today that their institutions plan to merge.

"The Longy School of Music of Bard College is excited about this compelling moment in the institution's history. Longy had been looking for a partner for several years and found an ideal match in mission and institutional direction in Bard College," Zorn said. "Bard is a bold leader in liberal arts education with a rich and broad curriculum, enhanced by an active and forward thinking community. Being part of the Bard family enables Longy to open our house to a wider community of musicians, scholars and world leaders."

"Longy's commitment to rigorous music education programs and preparing musicians to make a difference in the world is to be applauded," said Botstein. "It is Bard's firm belief that training artists to perfect their craft is only the first step. We must reach beyond mechanics and teach students how their art can positively impact communities. As individual institutions, Longy and Bard have done that. As merged institutions, our impact will be expansive. The intellectual and musical exchange will result in opportunities to boldly change the direction of music education in this country."

Since its founding in 1915, Longy has been a leading degree-granting conservatory and school of continuing and preparatory studies for nearly a century. Within the last several years, Longy graduates have gone directly into the ranks of major performing organizations, including the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Orchestre Philharmonique de Liège, Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo, San Francisco Orchestra and the Zurich Opera House Orchestra.

Bard College is internationally renowned as a highly selective independent coeducation college of the liberal arts and sciences dedicated to promoting a rigorous education through innovative programs and high academic standards. The College, founded in 1860 and located 90 miles north of New York City, offers undergraduate degrees in the arts, languages and literature, social studies, and natural sciences and mathematics, as well as graduate degrees in the studio and performing arts, environmental policy, curatorial studies, and the decorative arts and material culture.

Bard College is a private, highly selective independent coeducation college of the liberal arts and sciences dedicated to promoting a rigorous education through innovative programs and high academic standards. The College, founded in 1860 and located 90 miles north of New York City, offers undergraduate degrees in the arts, languages and literature, social studies, and natural sciences and mathematics, as well as graduate degrees in the studio and performing arts, environmental policy, curatorial studies, and the decorative arts and material culture. Bard College is also home to such research institutions as the Levy Economics Institute, the Bard Center for Environmental Policy, and the Center for Curatorial Studies Museum. The Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts at Bard College, designed by Frank O. Gehry, opened in 2002, presents performing arts programs year-round, including the highly acclaimed Bard SummerScape and Bard Music Festivals. It is also home to

Bard's theater and dance programs.

The Longy School of Music was founded in 1915 by renowned oboist Georges Longy. A degree-granting Conservatory and school of Preparatory and Continuing Studies, Longy is located in Harvard Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Longy is led by Karen Zorn, who became the School's 10th President in 2007. The school serves 225 undergraduate and graduate students from 37 states and 21 countries, and nearly 1,000 children and adults from the Greater Boston area. For all students, Longy provides a distinguished faculty that promotes profound musical understanding and technical mastery, encourages growth of imagination, and fosters inquiry about the role of music and the musician in the larger world. With a curriculum rooted in the traditions of Western music, Longy's mission is to prepare musicians to make a difference in the world. It is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges and the National Association of Schools of Music.

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June 13, 2011

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