Elaine Sisman Elected President of the American Musicological Society

BY KRISTIN STERLING

Elaine Sisman, chair of the Department of Music, has been elected president of the American Musicological Society (AMS), a professional organization founded in 1934 to advance research in the various fields of music as a branch of learning and scholarship. The Society now has 3,300 members and 1,200 subscribing institutions from 40 nations.

The AMS sponsors an annual meeting, the “central event” in the life of the Society, a journal (JAMS), publications such as the ongoing “Music of the United States of America,” sponsored by the National Endowment of the Humanities, and other activities including annual awards for the most outstanding article, book, student paper, and performance-oriented projects and several fellowships to fund the final year of exceptionally promising dissertations.

Beginning in November, Sisman will preside over the AMS for one year; president from November 2004 to November 2005. "I am honored to have the opportunity to lead the AMS in finding new ways to foster the growth of the field by encouraging scholars at all stages of their careers and showcasing their best work," she says.

Sisman joined the Columbia faculty in 1982 and was named chair of the music department in 1999. During this time the number of undergraduates majoring in music at Columbia grew sevenfold, and Music Humanities enrolls nearly 700 students every semester. In recent years, the jazz program has expanded and the number of chamber groups has increased.

"It is exciting to see so much performance on campus," says Sisman. "I’m very proud of that." Sisman also has worked to foster greater interaction within the four branches of the department—composition, historical musicology, ethnomusicology and theory.

"We are seeing that historical musicology is becoming more cultural, and ethnomusicology is becoming more historical," she says. "Some of our composers are also prominent theorists, and theory and history have always been closely connected. The jazz field cuts across all of these areas, and the Computer Music Center develops cutting-edge technology for use in composition and research."

Sisman’s scholarly work focuses on the history, aesthetics and rhetoric of later 18th and 19th century music, especially Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms. She is the author of numerous publications, including Haydn and the Classical Variation (Harvard University Press, 1993) and Mozart: The Jupiter Symphony (Cambridge University Press, 1993). She is the editor of Haydn and His World (Princeton University Press, 1997), which included her article “Haydn, Shakespeare, and the Rules of Originality.”

Elected to the boards of the Joseph Haydn-Institut in Cologne and the Zentralinstitut für Mozartsforschung in Salzburg, she is currently working on studies of music and melancholy, Mozart’s Don Giovanni, and Haydn’s Creation.

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