

# The Seattle Times

Sunday, April 6, 2008 - Page updated at 12:00 AM

Permission to reprint or copy this article or photo, other than personal use, must be obtained from The Seattle Times. Call 206-464-3113 or e-mail [resale@seattletimes.com](mailto:resale@seattletimes.com) with your request.

## At the Chapel, a marriage of space and sound

By Paul de Barros  
Seattle Times jazz critic

As you climb the wide, wooden stairwell to the Chapel Performance Space, it's easy to imagine schoolgirls with books strapped over their shoulders, noisily running to class to beat the bell. There's something about the smell, too, like an old library, that's reminiscent of a school.

That shouldn't be a surprise.

The Chapel, which last month celebrated one year as a hub for esoteric music, sits on the top floor of what was once a "home for wayward girls" in the Good Shepherd Center. Now it has transformed Wallingford into a magnet for experimental musicians of all kinds.

The concert hall itself is flat-out gorgeous, formerly an actual chapel, with hardwood floors and stained-glass windows, through which rays of light occasionally stream, as if God himself were blessing the experimental arts.

For a crowd that reveres artistic innovation as a sort of religion, the sacred overtones of the Chapel feel somehow appropriate.

"I was so happy when it happened, I almost couldn't believe it," says world-renowned Seattle trombonist and composer Stuart Dempster.

"You can just tell how really needy everybody was, because all the dates filled up."

The Chapel is a success story for Historic Seattle, a nonprofit dedicated to architectural preservation, which renovated the space but took two years to find the right tenant. That tenant turned out to be the Nonsequitur Foundation, a new music nonprofit with a hefty endowment that insulates it from the usual funding roller-coaster of most arts organizations. The Chapel is administered by Nonsequitur co-founder Steve Peters. The hall is already booked halfway through 2009.

Peters is an affable curator/director whose musical knowledge is deep and wide. The Chapel itself is in a bucolic location with views (on a clear day) of the Cascades and Olympics, a formal garden, playground and a spacious park that often reverberates with children's laughter and barking dogs.



KEN LAMBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES

The Chapel, once an actual chapel, is a 60-by-60-foot room with a 28-foot ceiling, hardwood floors and a low dais where the altar once stood.



KEN LAMBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES

It's "a beautiful concert space," said Steve Peters, who administers the Chapel as co-founder of the Nonsequitur Foundation, a new-music nonprofit.



KEN LAMBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES

The Chapel Performance space in Wallingford still has the stained-glass windows from its former life.

**The Chapel Performance Space at the Good Shepherd Center**

**Information:** 4649 Sunnyside Ave. N., Seattle (206-789-1939 or [www.gschapel.blogspot.com](http://www.gschapel.blogspot.com)).

The Chapel has been a long time coming.

"I spent a year looking for a space," says Peters. "But everything I was looking at was like, six, seven, eight thousand dollars a month. I was feeling really discouraged."

### A home for the arts

So was Historic Seattle. It acquired the Good Shepherd Center in 1976 and had successfully filled its labyrinth of rooms with a variety of tenants, including, from 1974 to '93, the Pacific Northwest Ballet. Its current occupants range from studio artists and therapists to the Meridian School, the Alliance Française, the Program for Early Parent Support (PEPS) and — outdoors — Seattle Tilth, a nonprofit organic gardening organization.

The Chapel remained a challenge. In 2005, seeking to interest theater producers, Historic Seattle added spacious dressing rooms with makeup lights, bathrooms, a thick white wall across the back of the room to insulate the artists' studios from noise, a lighting booth and lobby.

But the place is hardly ideal for theater. There are restrictions against noise before 5 o'clock, no shows allowed on Sunday and a ceiling of 85 patrons on weeknights and 150 on weekends. Plus, there is no backstage area and only one small elevator for loading-in.

What Peters saw when he came, however, was "a beautiful concert space."

In January, 2007, he tried it out, and by March 15 was presenting his first official show.

Not since the demise of the old Seattle Concert Theatre, in Cascadia (aka South Lake Union) in the '80s, has Seattle had such a lovely hall for new music. A 60-by-60-foot room with a 28-foot ceiling, hardwood floors and a low dais where the altar once stood, the Chapel was designed in an Italianate high-academic style, with tall, blond wainscoting and four wooden pillars with regular rectangular indentations.

Nonsequitur bought a grand piano and sound system for the room, and Historic Seattle provided lights, padded folding chairs and a drape to dampen the acoustics, which are still quite lively. Currently, shades have been ordered to black out the windows for film presentations or theatrical events.

"It's not particularly friendly to drums or brass," comments Earshot's executive director, John Gilbreath, "but it's a lovely space."

Nonsequitur pays Historic Seattle \$2,500 for 10 nights a month to present what Peters calls "adventurous" music, a term that can include everything from sound installations and modern classical to electroacoustic music, improvisation, computer music and "radio art," to name just a few terms in the organization's comprehensive statement of purpose (see <http://nseq.blogspot.com>).

"There's an experimental wing in all these different kinds of music," says Peters, "so I see them all as one big family. It seemed very important to make a home for all those people."

### Adventurous journey

Peters' interest in "adventurous music" blossomed at The Evergreen State College, when he played guitar in a band with Sub Pop founder Bruce Pavitt and was the music director at radio station KAOS, which helped foster the grunge revolution.

In 1989, while living in Santa Fe, N.M., Peters and New Yorker Jonathan Scheuer started Nonsequitur, funded by a Manhattan real-estate business in Scheuer's family. The organization began as a CD company, producing a "journal in sound" called "The Aerial," then moved into concert presenting.

In 2003, Peters moved back to the Northwest.

### Upcoming shows

**Wednesday:** Benefit for ex-Seattle musician Andrew D'Angelo, with Bill Frisell, Eyvind Kang, Wayne Horvitz, Cuong Vu and others.

**Thursday:** Charanga Danzón (Cuban).

**Friday:** Paul Rucker and Friends: Night of Cello.

**Saturday:** Gavin Borchert, Contemporary Chamber Music

**April 18:** Stephen Drury, Piano.

**April 25:** Seattle Chamber Players.

On its 10 designated nights, Nonsequitur presents "adventurous" concerts such as the recent, stunning solo recital by Frederic Rzewski, or rents out the space to organizations with a similar viewpoint. Earshot Jazz presented its "Jazz: The Second Century" series at the Chapel last year (and will again, this summer). The Seattle Improvised Music Festival; the Seattle Chamber Players; and Subtext, Seattle's contemporary poetry organization, have presented at the Chapel, as well.

As part of its contract with Historic Seattle, Nonsequitur also handles rentals to more traditional organizations, such as Baroque Northwest, but on non-Nonsequitur nights.

The rent is ridiculously low — \$200 — and, even better, if not enough people come to your show, you don't have to pay. (If you do make \$200, Nonsequitur takes 20 percent of the door.)

The whole operation is quite casual. Most of the time, says Peters, he just "hands over the key and my cellphone number" and asks people to clean up after themselves.

"It's a very interesting model," he says. "It probably has a lot to do with going to Evergreen. Giving people the means of production, that's what I consider this to be ... do your stuff here, and we will do our best to make sure that money is not a reason for you not to do it."

So far, things have worked out well for all concerned.

"We always intended it to be an affordable performance and assembly space, but not one we wanted to manage directly," says Historic Seattle's Director of Real Estate Development Mark Blatter. "Steve has been a great partner. And the music he does is a much better fit than theater."

Blatter says the space is currently renting about three to four nights per month apart from Nonsequitur events. People often drop by from the neighborhood, sometimes just out of curiosity.

One of the big attractions is ample parking. Built in 1906, The Good Shepherd Center sits on an 11-acre campus, 6.5 of which are the Parks Department's Meridian Playground.

One possible negative impact of the Chapel may be its effect on Gallery 1412, the tiny cooperative on Capitol Hill that has served for years as the city's new-music hub.

"When people come through town now, they want to play the Chapel, because it's nicer," says pianist Gust Burns, who helps run Gallery 1412 but also sits on the Chapel advisory board. "But I'm really not sorry that it's happening. I think it's a good thing."

Flutist Paul Taub, director of the Seattle Chamber Players, takes an evolutionary view.

"If there was a missing link, this was it," says Taub. "The sound is great. And it's a beautiful space."

*Paul de Barros: 206-464-3247 or [pdebarros@seattletimes.com](mailto:pdebarros@seattletimes.com)*

Copyright © 2008 The Seattle Times Company