



## Chaje!

In Bellefield Hall, students in a Pitt music ensemble get ready for their next performance—not just by playing their instruments, but also by hamming it up onstage. “Just try to feed off each other’s cheeseball-ness,” professor Adriana Helbig tells them. Their laughter fills the practice room.

A clarinetist kicks off with a rollicking melody. Two accordionists jump in, followed by a violinist, a banjo player, and a guy playing bouzouki, a Greek stringed instrument. The music is quick-tempoed and driving, yet melodic. The buzzing wheeze of the accordions can be heard clearly, and the high, sweet sound of female voices cuts through the instruments’ wail. Helbig thumps away at an upright piano in the corner, turning occasionally to nod and shout encouragement.

And then, in unison, all 13 musicians stop on a dime. “Chaje!” they shout. It’s a Roma word that’s also in the

title of the song, now being rehearsed by Pitt’s Carpathian Music Ensemble. The song is called “Chaje Shukarjie,” which means “beautiful girl.”

Helbig, an assistant professor in the Department of Music, started the ensemble last year when she joined Pitt’s faculty. Her formal training is in ethnomusicology, and she has traveled extensively in Ukraine and the Transcarpathian region to conduct research on music as a political resource in Roma, or Gypsy, cultures. The idea of Pitt’s ensemble, she says, isn’t to focus on the music of individual Eastern European countries separately but to be a “fusion” group, combining and crossbreeding different musical traditions. So far at today’s practice, the ensemble has played Macedonian and Slovak tunes, and they’ll tackle a klezmer song before they’re through.

The ensemble’s focus, too, is on the students’ collaborative process. Learning and performing a song might begin with Helbig’s research in the Roma villages of Ukraine. She’ll bring in a basic

transcription of the song as she heard it there. But the students will work out the arrangement for the song, figuring out how to make it work for them.

The ensemble performs often. “Because we are so open to all the different types of ethnic groups,” Helbig says, “they are all claiming us, in a way.” The group has performed at a mural opening in Troy Hill and a Ukrainian dance festival in Carnegie, Pa., as well as at Pitt’s Slovak Heritage Festival.

This focus on performance is the reason Helbig encourages the group to practice its “cheeseball-ness.” Their shows are supposed to be fun. As the clarinetist kicks off another go at “Chaje,” the string section sways in unison. A violinist leans toward a clarinet player, moving his bow with exaggerated, faux-romantic motions. Helbig turns from the piano and nods approvingly. She claps to the rhythm of the song, laughing with gusto.

—Adam Reger

## Angels in the Night

A phone on a desk vibrates. It’s 11 o’clock at night, and a Pitt business student is studying economics in her dorm room. She answers when she sees UPMC on the caller ID—she’s also a hospital volunteer. An administrator from Children’s Hospital asks for help: Orphans from Haiti will arrive at the hospital in a few hours, she explains. The hospital needs volunteers to welcome the children. The student, sophomore Leanne Ikeda, drops her economics textbook on the bed and quickly gets ready to leave. A taxi picks her up at midnight.

Ikeda received that surprising late-night call in January, a week after the strongest earthquake in Haiti’s history devastated its capital, Port-au-Prince. As a part-time volunteer at Children’s Hospital, Ikeda was recruited to help with a rare enterprise supported by the Obama administration, Pennsylvania Governor Edward Rendell, and other government officials. The mission—rescue 53 children from a damaged Haitian orphanage and bring them to Pittsburgh to be united with American parents who had been in the process of adopting them before the earthquake.