

Times Argus Feature

31 March 2018

Next to string quartets, piano trios are the favorite way to collaborate for string players; and for pianists, the favorite.

“Everyone gets to bring their full, individual voices to the musical table,” explains Letitia Quante, violinist with the Vermont Symphony Orchestra. “The sound conversations seem endlessly personal as we sing on our instruments, to each other and to the audience.”

“Though string quartets represent the pinnacle of string writing for most composers,” VSO principal cellist John Dunlop says, “the piano trio adds an element of percussion and color that the string quartet can’t quite match.”

Pianist Claire Black adds, “The trio setting allows each player a myriad of roles and the chance to experiment with layering our sounds without any of us ever completely disappearing into the texture as we might if we had even one more player in the mix.”

Black, Quante and Dunlop, three of Vermont’s busiest professional classical musicians, are the Stellaria Trio. Now in its second season, the trio is touring its latest program, “Dark Horses” – Beethoven’s Piano Trio No. 6 in E-flat, Op. 70, No. 2, and Dvorak’s Piano Trio No. 3 in F minor, Op. 65 – throughout the state.

Next weekend’s performances are at 7:30 p.m. Friday, April 6, at the Richmond Free Library; 7:30 p.m. Saturday, April 7, at the Brandon Music Café; and at 1 p.m. Sunday, April 8, at Dartmouth College’s Rollins Chapel in Hanover, New Hampshire. Later, the Stellaria program goes May 18 to Burlington’s St. Paul’s Cathedral and June 10 to the Shelburne United Methodist Church.

The three formed the Stellaria Trio in the fall of 2016. They drew its name from the Latin term for common chickweed, *stellaria media*. This curative herb stands for love and rejoining, a symbol of their devotion to chamber music and a perfect summary of their story.

“We came together as way for all of us, who had played together in different formations and always enjoyed the experience, to pool our love of music and explore a repertoire that was less familiar to all of us,” Dunlop said. “We have a lot of fun in rehearsal but also take the music very seriously. We are all very respectful of each other’s artistic choices and I believe we’ve learned a lot from this collaboration.”

Dunlop, the only Vermont native of the three, has been principal cellist, in addition to the VSO, for the Burlington Chamber Orchestra, Opera Company of Middlebury, Opera North, Vermont Mozart Festival, Vermont Virtuosi and the Green Mountain Opera Festival. He has performed as soloist with both the VSO and

BCO, as well as many chamber music performances with notable area musicians. He is also the cellist with the fledgling new music ensemble TURNmusic, which celebrates some of the most interesting young composers of our time.

While living in Maryland, Quante played principal with Mid-Atlantic Symphony and assistant concertmaster with Lancaster Symphony, and concertized both as a soloist and chamber musician in Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania and New York. She has also performed with Singapore Symphony, New World Symphony, Philharmonic Orchestra of the Americas and the Baltimore Chamber Orchestra.

“It is really only right now, with Claire and John, that I am finally exploring the monumental literature and freedom of speech that the piano trio offers a violinist,” Quante said. “Never before have I felt such organic conversations between instruments, although that might also just be because of Claire and John.”

A native of Long Lake, New York, Black toured for many years with the Cialde Quintet and with her cello-piano Elegua Duo. She previously taught at the Oberlin Community Music School and at Cleveland Institute of Music’s Summer Sonata festival for young pianists. She currently works in several administrative capacities, serving on the Vermont Music Teachers Association board as competitive auditions chairwoman, and as bookings coordinator for the Cathedral Arts Series in Burlington.

“Beyond having excellent training and professional experience, I think we’re well matched on many levels,” Black said. “While each player brings his and her own special energy and strengths to the group, we remain unified in our desire to bring the printed score to life in a way that speaks to us and to our listeners in a meaningful way.”

Quante added, “It is with Stellaria that time stops and I become a child again - filled with musical wonder and desire.”

Stellaria Trio

The Stellaria Trio presents “Dark Horses,” violinist Letitia Quante, cellist John Dunlop, and pianist Claire Black playing Beethoven’s Piano Trio No. 6 in E-flat Major and Dvorak’s Piano Trio No. 3 in F minor:

- Friday, April 6: Richmond - donation, Richmond Free Library, 7:30 p.m., richmondfreelibraryvt.org.
- Saturday, April 7: Brandon - \$20 (\$25 for pre-concert dinner), Brandon Music Café, 7:30 p.m., 802-247-4295, www.brandon-music.net.
- Sunday, April 8: Hanover, N.H. - ChamberWorks, free, Dartmouth College, Rollins Chapel, 1 p.m., hop.dartmouth.edu.
- Friday, May 18: Burlington - Cathedral Arts, \$20, \$15 for seniors and students, \$5 for 14 and younger, St. Paul’s Cathedral, 7:30 p.m., www.stpaulscathedralvt.org/cathedral-arts.html.
- Sunday, June 10: Shelburne - donation, United Methodist Church, 2:30 p.m., shelburneumc.org.