

**Blue Streak Ensemble to present  
“Down Home Classical” February 25**

by Carlyn Kessler



“I thought the name ‘Down Home Classical’ fit perfectly because chamber music originally started in the home,” composer Margaret Brouwer explained in a telephone conversation. “Back before television, families would get together and play chamber music in the home, and all of this music is very much that kind of chamber music. And the place where we’re performing, Dunham Tavern, is like a great big living room. The audience will be sitting pretty close to the musicians, which will be almost like a home environment.”

On Thursday, February 25 at 7:30 pm at Cleveland’s Dunham Tavern Museum, the Blue Streak Ensemble (BSE), directed by award-winning composer Margaret Brouwer, will present “Down Home Classical,” an evening of American porch music. “It’s very American music,” said Brouwer. “There are a lot of beautiful melodies, wonderful sparkling sounds, and fun, catchy rhythms.”

Brouwer, professor emeritus and former head of the composition department at the Cleveland Institute of Music, formed Blue Streak in 2011, with the “thrilling” rollercoaster at Ohio’s beloved Cedar Point in mind as its inspiring namesake. The ensemble has given performances both locally and nationally in venues ranging from Nighttown to New York City’s Symphony Space. The ensemble was featured on Brouwer’s 2014 chamber music album *Shattered* on the Naxos label.

Thursday’s concert will feature violinists Emma Shook and Kimia Ghaderi, violist Aaron Mossburg, cellist Robert Nicholson, and percussionist Luke Rinderknecht, “all really fabulous musicians who play in various orchestras, including The Cleveland Orchestra,” Brouwer said. “Dunham Tavern is such a special place, too. It will be a

really beautiful concert. We all love this music, and we're very eager to share it with people."

I asked Brouwer to say a few words about each of the pieces on the program.

I think of my string quartet *Demeter Prelude* as family music because it's all about Demeter, the Greek goddess of the harvest, searching for her daughter, who's been abducted. Demeter stands up to Zeus and Hades and demands that her daughter be returned. It's really about a mother and her daughter.

Mark Phillips's *Porch Music* for violin, cello, and percussion is in some ways where I got the name for the concert. It's very much influenced by Appalachian music and begins with sounds you might hear if you were sitting on the porch, like crickets and rustling of the leaves. You can envision a summer afternoon with people jamming on different tunes. It is a terrific piece and has catchy rhythms and melodies. I think that people will really enjoy it.

*Brandeis Sunday* for string quartet, written by Yehudi Wyner, is also very home-oriented. It is intimate, expressive, and seems perfect for sitting in a living room, with listeners close by. A beautiful piece.

Another piece of mine is *Through the Haze*. I wrote it last spring, after I had gone through two winters of snowy haze in Cleveland. And then last spring, in May and June, it rained practically every day. There was so much haze that you could hardly see the sky. So, this piece is all about me sitting in my house or on the porch looking at the haze.

This piece is also fun because I'm using some instruments in it that I have in my home, for instance a rain stick that I bought in the Bahamas. I'm also using some telephone bells that I've collected from the inside of old-fashioned telephones. They are lovely, pitched brass bells that have a gorgeous, ringing sound.

*Through the Haze* is what we call a spatial piece. The musicians will be on different sides of the hall, surrounding the audience, so the bell sounds will come from different directions. We performed it in New York last summer, and people seemed to really enjoy it.

Rob Smith's *Breaking Home* is just for solo percussion, but some of the percussion instruments are actually clay pots, which are also "homey." So, that's how the name came about!

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