

“Men Who Don’t Bite” bassoon quartet to play Family Promise benefit in Oberlin

by Mike Telin



Men Who Don’t Bite — a bassoon quartet that includes Oberlin Conservatory professor George Sakakeeny, Cleveland Orchestra members Jonathan Sherwin and Barrick Stees, and University of Kansas professor Eric Stomberg — will join Oberlin Conservatory pianist James Howsmon in a benefit concert for Family Promise of Lorain County on Sunday, April 10 at 3:00 pm at First Church, 106

North Main St. in Oberlin. (Because of a scheduling conflict, Jonathan Sherwin will be replaced by Tom English for this concert.)

“We combine serious music skills and a light-hearted sense of humor,” said Sakakeeny about the quartet, whose name refers to the accepted technique of placing one’s lips on the bassoon reed.

In a February 2013 interview with *ClevelandClassical.com*, Sakakeeny said it was Barrick Stees who was responsible for the group’s name. “I deny any ownership of that title but I do kind of like it — our bite isn’t as bad as our bark,” Sakakeeny said. But in the same interview Stees remembered things this way: “We were just rehearsing, and George looked up and said that it’s so nice to look around and see everybody with good embouchures. I said, ‘We’re not biting the reed,’ so that’s how we got the name Men Who Don’t Bite.”

Sunday’s program will include Peter Schickele’s *Blue Set #2* for four bassoons. Watch a video of Men Who Don’t Bite’s performance at the 2013 International Double Reed Society conference [here](#).

Bassoon students from Oberlin Conservatory and the Cleveland Institute of Music will join the quartet during Barrick Stees’ arrangement of Heitor Villa-Lobos’ lyrical and haunting *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5* for soprano and eight bassoons, conducted by

Oberlin's director of orchestras, Raphael Jiménez. Sakakeeny, who pointed out that the piece is originally scored for soprano and cello choir, said that eight bassoons playing staccato sounds quite different from cellos playing pizzicato, "but it's a really great sound," he quipped. "And Olivia Boen [a third-year voice major at Oberlin] is fantastic."

The quartet will also be featured in Stees' arrangements of the Passacaglia from Shostakovich's *String Quartet No. 6*, and the Andante from his *String Quartet No. 10*. Other works on the program are *Duetto for two Bassoons* by Wilhelm Freidemann Bach performed by Stees and Stomberg, two pieces by Brazilian composer Hilda Reis performed by Stees, and the Hindemith Sonata, for which Oberlin faculty pianist James Howsmon will join Sakakeeny.

A freewill offering will benefit Family Promise of Lorain County, a community agency that assists homeless families through its Interfaith Hospitality Network, partnering with local congregations and volunteers to shelter, feed, and care for families who have no place to live. The organization also hosts a Day Center that enables parents and young children to be together during the day, and helps parents access social services and find housing and jobs to sustain their families. A "meet the artists" reception will follow the concert.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com April 4, 2016.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)