

Service Day: Credo Music students visit Grafton Correctional Facility

by Delaney Meyers



On a recent visit to Grafton Correctional Facility, students from Credo Music Festival performed for and talked with some of the residents in the prison’s chapel, with an audience of about 50 and a backdrop of multiple green plants. This was part of Credo’s weekly service day, during which young musicians engage with the community in multiple ways — from picking up trash along the side of the highway, to performing at places that aren’t often filled with music.

Two college-aged fellowship string quartets participated in the Grafton concert. Credo founder Peter Slowik greeted the residents, revealing his “ulterior motives” to “prove that classical music isn’t boring,” met with a laugh. This casual rapport continued throughout the afternoon, as the residents asked questions about the performances and the students’ career interests.

After Slowik’s eccentric introduction, the first ensemble launched into the second and fourth movements of Debussy’s *String Quartet*. The residents were intensely attentive, many appearing to lose themselves in the swirling, impressionistic music, closing their eyes or furrowing their brows during the darker moments. After a round of immediate and enthusiastic applause, Slowik asked if there were any questions about the music. One resident raised his hand and said, “Didn’t that piece change time signatures a lot?” — an astute observation that many audiences might not have picked up on.

After several more questions, cellist Maya Enstad and violist Anders Cornell (members of the second quartet) performed Beethoven’s jovial “Eyeglass” duo. Written for two of his friends, it’s dripping with humor and even sarcasm. Despite not having touched the piece since April, which Slowik noted before their performance, Enstad and Cornell were very entertaining and in good spirits as they played. They seemed to be thoroughly

enjoying themselves, and the residents clearly appreciated this, often laughing at the more ridiculous moments in the piece.

Transitioning from traditional classical music, the second quartet played several arrangements of Beatles tunes and other popular songs, some with improvised embellishments. They started with a lovely rendition of *Yesterday*, and followed with Imagine Dragons' *Radioactive*, Gershwin's *Summertime*, and Scott Joplin's *The Entertainer*, which several men said they had played on the piano before. The Beatles' *Eight Days a Week* was played by popular demand, and almost turned into a full-blown sing-a-long. I joined the quartet on violin for a brief fiddle tune composed for the Danish String Quartet, and they ended with the ever-popular *Hey Jude*, which received a standing ovation.

As Slowik explained, this concert was doing double-duty both as an outreach event and as an advertisement for the pilot program Credo will begin at Grafton this fall, where they will use donated instruments to provide music lessons for interested residents. The initial program will involve volunteers from Credo and from Oberlin Conservatory, and Slowik hopes to develop a sustainable plan moving past Spring of 2019, perhaps with a Conservatory class devoted to the effort.

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