

Credo Music celebrates 20 years in Oberlin

by Daniel Hathaway



Among the several distinguished chamber music programs in Northeast Ohio that welcome young musicians each summer, Credo Music is unique for its parallel emphasis on providing professional-level music instruction to students ages 13-23, and on serving others — both through outreach concerts and in volunteering opportunities in food banks, park districts, churches, Habitat for Humanity, and homeless shelters.

Oberlin Conservatory viola professor Peter Slowik, who founded Credo in Chicago in 1999, said in a recent telephone conversation that this summer is a time to reflect on the last two decades. “Twenty years is a big milestone. Musical generations turn over every three, four, or five years. This is an opportunity to look back and see what we’ve done in the past, and to pivot toward where we’re going to be in the future.”



Slowik said that Credo has been “blessed from the beginning” to have virtually all of its faculty return every summer. “We were all in our early 40s at the beginning, and now we’re all in our 60s, so we have to think about refreshing ourselves. Because we’re probably not going to keep doing this when we’re in our 90s, this is an inflection point.”

Some aspects of Credo’s program in Oberlin are constant from year to year — students spend fifteen hours in musical coaching each week and commit to three hours of daily individual practice, preparing for two free weekly performances at the Oberlin Conservatory in addition to outreach concerts. They also collectively log some 1,000 hours of community service each season.



“One new program is our relationship with the [Grafton Correctional Facility](#),” Slowik said. “We’ve been teaching the residents there during the school year, and the summer students are going to put together a side-by-side experience with them in addition to our usual programs that include inner-city children’s ministries, nursing homes, and hospice centers.”

Slowik said that some accomplishments over Credo’s two decades stand out. “The idea that music had some kind of responsibility to society was relatively new back in 1999, but we made it part of our DNA from the beginning. Now there are many programs that recognize the responsibility young musicians have to share their musical skill with society,” he said, adding, “It’s nice to see how the rest of the world has caught up with us! Our gift is super important in keeping our world sane.”

It's especially satisfying for Slowik to watch Credo's alumni grow into positions of leadership. "It's really fantastic to see them serving on boards of organizations like the American Viola Society, winning competitions, and joining major orchestras and the faculties of major music schools. People who have gone through our programs tend to be 'other-centered' rather than 'self-centered,' and those are qualities we can certainly use in today's society."



The second week of Credo in Oberlin will feature several concerts. A lunchtime performance by students will begin at noon on Thursday, July 18 in the East College St. Courtyard at the Conservatory, and student chamber music performances will take place on Saturday, July 20 at 2:00 pm and 8:00 pm in Kulas Recital Hall. Those events are free.

On Friday, July 19 at 8:00 pm in Kulas, a concert by Credo faculty and fellowship students will feature Kangwon Kim, Kevie Yu, Sarita Kwok, Zion Lee, and Elizabeth Larson, violins, Michael Sabatka, Kathryn Steely, and Sarah Mason, violas, Bryan Dumm, Isaiah Wu, and Jocelyn Meyer, cellos, and James Howsmon, piano,



Hugo Wolf's *Italian Serenade* along with Mozart's *String Quintet in D*, K. 593 and *Piano Quartet No. 1 in g*, K. 478. Tickets are \$10 at the door.

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But Credo won't be finished for the summer after the July 20 performances. A Gala 20th Anniversary Concert will take place in Chicago's Symphony Center on Sunday, July 28 at 3:00 pm, when John Nelson and Peter Slowik will lead the Chicago All-City String Orchestra (comprised of music students from the Merit School of Music, People's Music School, and the South Side Suzuki Cooperative) and the Credo Festival Orchestra (made up of students from the 2019 Credo Festival and alumni from Credo's twenty summers) in music by Holst, Tchaikovsky, Mozart, and Rimsky-Korsakov.

Featured soloists in Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante* will be violinist Rachel Barton Pine and violist Matthew Lipman, who was a Credo student in 2005 and 2006, went on to study at Juilliard, and now appears regularly with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.



“Credo started in Chicago, and it’s an easy place for alumni to gather, but Oberlin is the epicenter,” Slowik said. “Amazing people come through Credo at 14, 15, or 16, and Matthew is a great illustration of someone whose first serious experience of a high-level, away-from-home music program was in Oberlin.”

Published on ClevelandClassical.com July 16, 2019.

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