

## Credo Music joint faculty/student concert in Oberlin (July 19)

by Nicholas Stevens



Much of the magic of summer festivals remains forever hidden from the outside world. The masterclass that permanently rewires a student's artistic circuitry, the rehearsal that converts a passing interest into a lifelong specialty, the practice-room collaboration that sows the seeds of a friendship or ensemble: these all elude public view. However, communities do have one point of access: concerts.

If the recent Faculty Concert on the 2019 Credo Festival is any indication, then this Oberlin institution has maintained a steady rhythm over its twenty years in operation.

Selected student performers joined professional string players and pianists onstage at Oberlin's Kulas Recital Hall on Friday, July 19. The small, hard-walled room seemed to impede the expected blend between the piano (played by James Howsmon) and its fellows, despite the expert playing of all involved. Ultimately a minor concern, this acoustic oddity nonetheless gave audience members a chance to hear how well the string players coordinated in Mozart's *Piano Quartet in g*

Faculty violinist Elizabeth Larson and student violist Sarah Mason matched articulations and phrasing with remarkable precision, as student cellist Isaiah Wu supported group textures with excellent tone and tuning. Mason continued to shine throughout, even in subtle, subsidiary lines. Larson bent the tempo to wonderful effect halfway through the

first movement, and the rest of the quartet seemed mentally melded to her as all followed suit. While the Andante trembled under the weight of tempos and interpretive choices more reminiscent of Mahler than Mozart, the Rondo Finale sparked with delightful and unflagging energy.

Hugo Wolf's *Italian Serenade* presents string players with a labyrinth of sudden key changes, unexpected notes, and surging melodies. Faculty members Kangwon Kim, Michael Sabatka, and Bryan Dumm, along with student violinist Kevie Yu, rose to the challenge with an audaciously sprightly opening and relentless journey from there forward. Kim and Yu locked in on their rhythms as first and second violins, respectively, and Sabatka and Dumm remained on their toes even as Wolf's harmonic ground constantly shifted beneath them.

The concert concluded with its highlight, a performance of Mozart's *String Quintet in D* featuring another unique configuration of teachers and students. Student cellist Jocelyn Meyer initiated the proceedings, playing the utterly exposed solo flourishes of the opening with calm and grace. Sarita Kwok's turn as first violin found her shining in that role, with just the sort of clear, extroverted playing that the part demands. Though the score rarely gives the second violin much solo material, student player Zion Lee sounded pristine whenever her sound cut through.

However, Mozart places the first viola in the spotlight for extended stretches, and in this rare starring role, Kathryn Steely commanded singular respect. From her lovely tone to her courageous expressive intonation and phrasing, Steely made the most of her rare opportunity to take command. Second viola Peter Slowik handled his comparatively modest support role with the restraint and taste usually demanded of a string quartet's lone viola. For Meyer, the rest of the piece presented fewer moments of lonely leadership, but endless opportunities to show off her obvious gift for ensemble playing.

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