

Cavani and 90 students take last lap of “Beyond Beethoven” project to Severance on Tuesday, December 14

by Daniel Hathaway



“It’s like putting on all the Shakespeare plays in a month — it takes all your heart and soul and energy,” Cavani Quartet founder and primo violin Annie Fullard said in a recent telephone conversation about their “[Beyond Beethoven](#)” project.

But unlike Shakespeare, no blood was spilled, nobody got poisoned, and no kings were deposed during a three-month program that brought all sixteen of Beethoven’s string quartets — performed in

tandem with works by eight living composers — to audiences in as many concerts and different venues around the metropolitan area, and involved working with four high school orchestra programs. “If I had to find one word to describe it, it’s been a lovefest,” Fullard said.

Fullard, a founding member of the Cavani Quartet, played for a decade with its original members, then for 25 years with the second generation of players. Her third time around is also her second time presenting the complete Beethoven cycle, now with three new musicians (she calls it “Cavani 2.0”)

The project will culminate in a Grand Finale on Tuesday evening, December 14 at 7:30 pm in Mandel Hall at



Severance Music Center, when the Cavani — Annie Fullard and Catherine Cosbey, violins, Eric Wong, viola, and Kyle Price, cello — play Beethoven's Opus 59, No. 3, followed by two premieres.



The first will be a cello quintet by 17-year-old composer Camari Dodson-Poindexter, followed by a Cavani commission, Josh Henderson's *A Bop for Bridge*, an homage to George Bridgetower, the young Black violin virtuoso for whom Beethoven wrote his tenth Violin Sonata, nicknamed "The Kreutzer."



The Henderson work will be played by some 90 teachers and students from Cleveland State University, Cleveland Heights High School, Cleveland School of the Arts, Lakewood High School, Shaker Heights High School, and Strongsville High School, with whom the Cavani have been working since the beginning of the project.

The evening will be hosted by Dr. Ronald Crutcher, recently retired president of the University of Richmond, president emeritus of

Wheaton College, and former dean at the Cleveland Institute of Music, who has been a member of the Cincinnati Symphony. “He’s at the forefront of higher education, and an amazing cellist,” Fullard said.

Although such a complicated project calls for careful planning, there was also some serendipity involved in commissioning the new work. “We had to change composers when No. 1 withdrew,” Fullard said. “I panicked, but our cellist Kyle Price recommended Josh Henderson, who was happy to take it on and wrote the piece in a miraculously short time.”



Henderson, a cross-genre violinist, violist, and composer recognized for his dynamic performances of jazz, rock, Hip-Hop, and Country-Fiddle, has written film scores, chamber works, and a full-length ballet that was premiered by the Alvin Ailey company in 2012.

“Josh’s piece is very poetic, and structured like a concerto grosso between quartet and orchestra. It has elements of jazz and rock, and works beautifully in this program

where Beethoven is the catalyst,” Fullard said. “He was optimistic about the universal goodness of humanity even while being grumpy to the people around him. His music has a feeling of loving redemption, sometimes silliness, and a sense of humor, always coming out on the bright side.”



Serendipity also played a role in including Kamari Dodson-Poindexter in the project. The cellist, now a freshman at Ohio State University studying both cello performance and physics, had “Zoomed and bonded” with Cavani during the first year of the pandemic, which was “a lifeline for everybody,” Fullard said.

“He wrote a few quartets for his friends that were originally included in the Beethoven project, but the other members of his group graduated during the lockdown. Tuesday evening’s program will feature the first performance of his *Serenity*.

“We hope for a great audience at Severance,” Fullard said, “so the kids can feel the love.”

Tickets are available from the Severance [box office](#).

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