

## Kent Blossom faculty concerts continue with Poiesis Quartet

by Daniel Hathaway



The Poiesis Quartet, Founded during Oberlin Conservatory's Advanced Quartet Seminar program in Fall 2022, has been on an award-winning roll beginning with the Grand Prize in the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition (2023) as well as Fischhoff's Senior Strings Gold Medal and the Lift Every Voice prizes, and the Gold Medal and BIPOC Prize at the 2023 St. Paul String Quartet Competition.

Most recently, they won the Louis & Susan Meisel Competition, which put them on the Concert Artists Guild roster for management in North America.

The Quartet — violinists Sarah Ma & Max Ball, violist Jasper de Boor & cellist Drew Dansby — have also been appointed to the faculty of the Kent Blossom Music Festival, and will hold master classes and give a 7:30 recital on Wednesday, July 10 in Ludwig Recital Hall at Kent State University.

I spoke with Sarah Ma in Cincinnati, where the ensemble are in residence at the College-Conservatory, to ask about their sojourn at Kent.

*DH: Have you been to Blossom yet?*

*SM: No, not yet. We're going to drive up there tomorrow when we'll give a master class and play a concert.*

*DH: Let me ask you how it feels to be mentoring these days rather than being mentored.*

*SM:* It took a little bit of time for us to adjust to being in that position. After we won Fischhoff, we were asked to do some master classes while we were on tour. And in Cincinnati we're partnering with a couple of schools here to do educational outreach. As we are developing our careers, it's starting to feel more familiar and less daunting to be working with students instead of being students.

I think what I realized is that whenever we give masterclasses, it feels like our own rehearsal process, because I wouldn't tell students something that I wouldn't say to my group. And a lot of what we talk about in rehearsal applies to every single ensemble or student that we work with. So it's nice to teach and give master classes. It feels really comfortable.

*DH:* *So you don't have a case of imposter syndrome.*

*SM:* I think it's definitely there, and it's definitely daunting, especially with this program. Kent/Blossom is such a huge festival, and we were so lucky to be asked to come and perform and also give a master class. I was looking at the list of faculty, and I thought, Oh, my! These are people like the Imani Winds whose concerts I went to when I was younger. I just went to see them in Cincinnati, and we stayed after their concert for hours just to try to say hi to them. Now we're on this series, and there might be some students who have worked with both them and us. That is pretty scary.



*DH: What will you be playing on Wednesday evening?*

*SM: It's mostly music by new composers. We're beginning with Kevin Lau's Third Quartet — he's a Chinese-Canadian composer. And then we're going to be playing Brahms' string quartet number three, which is super crazy hard. Then after intermission we have Joe Hisaishi's First Quartet — he's the composer who wrote the scores for all those adorable Studio Ghibli movies like *Ponyo*. After that, we're closing with Eleanor Alberga's Second Quartet.*

*DH: Sounds like a great program. How do you choose your repertoire? Is it a democratic process?*

*SM: It's very hard for our group because we have really strong personalities, and it's always been difficult for us to choose repertoire that we're all passionate about. So whenever we choose programs, it's about what stories we want to tell as a group. Choosing more imagery-based music and then bridging it together with music like Brahms' creates this really beautiful and intimate landscape, and prepares an audience for experiencing older, more traditional music in a similar way that we create characters for new music. So that's really exciting for us. We love working on new repertoire because it enhances the way that we interpret everything.*

*DH: Part of the Fischhoff Prize is Poiesis' 10-day residency at the Emilia-Romagna Festival in August. Are you looking forward to your time in Italy?*

*SM: I'm so excited! We're going to be collaborating with some students there, and playing the Mozart Clarinet Quintet with an Italian soloist. And I've heard that the seafood is amazing!*

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