

CLASSICAL MUSIC

THE SOUL OF SERAFIN

Quartet recording works by Pulitzer-winning composer



The News Journal/FRED COMEGYS

Serafin – from left, Kate Ransom and Timothy Schwarz on the violin, Ana Tsinadze on the viola and Lawrence Stomberg on the cello – go over their music during a recent practice session at the University of Delaware.

By BETSY PRICE
 The News Journal

Classical musicians often debate with great vigor exactly what a composer meant with a certain piece of music, even for works hundreds of years old that have been played thousands of times.

“Musicians will say, oh, well, pick up the red phone and call Beethoven, and we wish we could,” says Kate Ransom, violinist for Serafin String Quartet.

But she and the other members of Serafin – Timothy Schwarz, Ana Tsinadze and Lawrence Stomberg – won’t have to joke about it for their next recording. They’ll be able to pick up their cell phones and get the composer on the line.

The quartet is recording works by Jennifer Higdon, the Philadelphia composer who won the Pulitzer Prize last year and already has been announced as next year’s A.I. du Pont composer winner for the Delaware Symphony Orchestra.

“We would never give up Beethoven or Bach, but getting to try new composers is part of the fun,” says Stomberg.

The recording, planned before Higdon won and expected to be finished by the end of this year, will be their second CD. It follows their eponymously named and well-reviewed 2010 disc that included works by William Grant Still, Antonin Dvorak, Samuel Barber and George Gershwin.

The quartet is just one example of the fine chamber groups in the Delaware area that include Brandywine Baroque and Melomanie, which has just released its own CD. Melomanie will celebrate the arrival of “Florescence” Friday during the Art Loop at the Chris White Gallery at Shipley Lofts.

Ransom, who by day is president of the Music School of Delaware, says the amount of excellent musicianship is a regional phenomenon.

“There has been a proliferation of



Members of Serafin String Quartet are in the midst of recording their second album.

musical activity in the Wilmington and Delaware area, and I think a lot of it has flowed from the tremendous concentration of well-trained musicians from Washington to New York,” Ransom says. “It’s the most concentrated area for well-trained musicians in the world. You’re talking about literally hundreds of people trained to the highest level of their disciplines.”

Their existence, and the existence of audiences for the groups, flies in the face of talk that the arts are dying, she says. As president of the music school, she knows that there are more people than ever studying music or involved in it. But there’s also more going on in other entertainment areas, she notes.

Good things, small packages

Ransom prefers the intimacy of a string quartet like Serafin to playing with a big orchestra.

“It’s sort of an instrumental mirror of an ASTB choir,” she says. “You have the soprano, alto, tenor and bass voices, if you will, but the fact that one instrument is on a part gives it incredible power to express emotion and power to express conversation and exchange, very intimate and very intense.”

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IF YOU GO

Serafin String Quartet

WHEN: 8 p.m. Friday

WHERE: Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

PROGRAM: Works by Bartok, Barber and Higdon

TICKETS: \$25

FOR MORE INFORMATION: (215) 898-3900; www.annenbergcenter.org

Serafin String Quartet with Grant Youngblood, bass

WHEN: 2 p.m. Feb. 13

WHERE: Calvary Episcopal Church, 304 Lore Ave., Wilmington

PROGRAM: Works by Barber (Dover Beach), Mozart and Beethoven

TICKETS: Free

FOR MORE INFORMATION: 764-2027; www.calvaryhillcrest.org

“There has been a proliferation of musical activity in the Wilmington and Delaware area.”

Kate Ransom, a member of Serafin String Quartet

DELAWARE STYLE FILES



The News Journal/JENNIFER CORBETT

George Meldrum’s Gucci boots and Hugo Boss jeans compliment his Daniel Hechter jacket and Izod watch.

Classically American, with a European flair

Who: George Meldrum, 63, of Wilmington, a lobbyist for Nemours Foundation

Why: Dubbed by some in Legislative Hall as the best-dressed lobbyist in Dover, Meldrum thinks he stands out because he takes more risks with this clothes: “The problem most people have is that they are too conservative. They are afraid of color, and they go the opposite way – and they end up looking bland.”

ALISON KEPNER Fashion consultant Vincent Garibaldi describes his friend’s style as “a classical American style with a European twist to it.”

Meldrum was photographed at Legislative Hall in Dover in three outfits:

First outfit – Versace suit, Dolce & Gabbana shirt, Saks tie, Cole Haan shoes and glasses from Peter Kate.

Second outfit – Coat from Mystique Fashion Boutique in Wilmington, Horny Toad pants, Kenneth Cole shoes, Zegna shirt, vest from Bloomingdales and belt from Baja, Mexico.

Third outfit – Daniel Hechter jacket, Burberry shirt, Hugo Boss jeans, Izod watch and Gucci boots.

Go-to store: “I shop all over, but Saks is really my favorite. I buy a lot of my clothes at the Saks Fifth Avenue Outlet in Franklin Mills (Pa.). They carry the suits that really fit me well. I like tailored, fitted clothes. Usually the better the suit, the better the fit.”

Know what to buy: “I only buy things that I really like. I’m careful about that,” he said. “It’s no bargain if you aren’t going to wear it.”

Be risky: “I’m into stuff that’s a little bit more cutting edge,” Meldrum said. “If I lived in New

See STYLE – E2



George Meldrum wears a coat from Mystique Fashion in Wilmington and Kenneth Cole shoes.

FIRST LOOK

Slam dunk at UD’s ice cream stand



The News Journal/WILLIAM BRETZGER

University of Delaware junior Jessie Ermak (left) and senior Caitlyn Merrill scoop ice cream at the UDairy Creamery booth.

Down 10 with just over seven minutes to go in a Jan. 19 game against the Northeastern Huskies, the University of Delaware men’s basketball team stormed back, re-claimed the lead and held on for a 54-52 win.

PETER BOTHUM

But even though Jamelle Hagins’ jam with 22 seconds left put the Hens up for good, it was not the slam dunk of the night.

No, that honor would have gone to the UDairy ice cream stand and its butter pecan and vanilla cones – that is, if you asked a pair

of young, intrepid taste testers who really know their ice cream.

These non-basketball highlights took place five minutes before halftime in the concourse, which was a wise choice, according to one young woman working the stand. The line can back up, even when the stands aren’t filled to the brim.

Our 7-year-old ice cream critic reported that UDairy’s butter pecan ice cream was “really good.” But was it better than her

See TASTE – E2

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Music: Instruments tell a story

FROM PAGE E1

Watching the musicians rehearse at the University of Delaware, where they have been named ensemble in residence, is like watching two conversations at once: vocal and musical. Ransom picks up her bow and the quartet is off on a folk song from the Republic of Georgia, Ana's homeland. The more you watch, though, the more you realize that they are watching each other and communicating in subtle ways, such as the slight lift of an eyebrow. "We actually are choreographing everything," Tsinadze says. Stomberg says the quartet is special partly because all four members play instruments that operate the same way, with bows across strings. The ideal is to play as if they were playing one instrument.

Each of Serafin's instruments is a story in itself. Ransom plays a violin made by Sanctus Serafin in 1728; the quartet is named for him. Schwarz plays a violin made in 1741 by Carlo Antonio Testore and Tsinadze a Testore viola made in 1754. Stomberg's cello is attributed to the school of Testore's shop in 1727.

Schwarz's violin, Tsinadze's viola and Stomberg's cello were all loaned to them by Dr. William Stegeman, a student of Ransom's and also president of Jackson ImmunoResearch Laboratories Inc. in Jenersville, Pa. "Professionally they are a very outstanding group," Stegeman says. "I wanted them to have the best instrument that they could possibly get. The sound of those instruments matches most closely with Kate's violin."

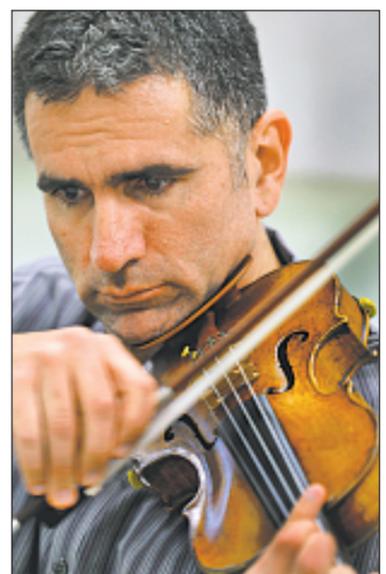
At the rehearsal, the folk song is giving them a little trouble. Ransom leads this one - she and Schwarz equally share the lead - and a few notes into the song, they're losing each other. They try it several times. "I feel like the response and the emphasis need to come from someone else than me because I'm just struggling to make it," Ransom says.

"I can try to drive it without my bass," Stomberg says. They try again. "Try it without me," Ransom says, and the three others play without her. "I think the only weak point is that first measure," she says. "Once we get into it, it flows along nicely." The sound is not lifting enough, she says. And so they go, until they work it out and sweep through the piece.

'Amazing opportunity'

Serafin began in 2002 and after several personnel changes solidified in February 2007 when Tsinadze joined the group.

"All of us are musicians and like most musicians, we build our lives from a number of components," Ransom says. "Like most musicians, they include performing, teaching and coordinating or organizing. Administration in my case."



Members of Serafin (clockwise from top): Ana Tsinadze on viola, Timothy Schwarz on violin, Kate Ransom on violin and Lawrence Stomberg on cello.

Schwarz is the violin professor at Lehigh University, where he is head of the strings department. Stomberg is the cello professor at UD and heads the graduate strings program. Tsinadze is the adjunct viola professor at UD and also teaches at Temple University.

Centaur Records agreed to record them after an amazingly simple approach.

Serafin long had recorded a sample disc each year, and a few years ago, the group sent one to Centra. The company immediately agreed to record them and even allowed them to choose what they wanted to record.

Their music - Stills' "Danzas de Panama for String Quartet," Dvorak's "String Quartet in F. Major, Op. 95," Barber's "String Quartet in B Minor, Op. 11," and Gershwin's "Lullaby for String Quartet" - all was American or

American-influenced music. They were particularly happy to record Barber, a Chadds Ford native who would have been 100 last year.

They will record Higdon's "Sky Quartet," "Amazing Grace" for string quartet, "String Trio," "Sonata for Viola and Piano" and "Dark Wood" for strings, piano and bassoon for a disc to be released by Naxos.

"It's an amazing opportunity," Ransom says. "We as a group felt like we connected with Jennifer's music right away when we starting delving into it."

Sometimes, musicians need a while to overcome technical or sonic issues when new music before they feel like they are getting to the voice in the music, she says.

And it's been a privilege. Contact Betsy Price at 324-2884 or beprice@delawareonline.com.

Ex-poet laureate goes face-to-face with her girlhood

By ABBY MILLAGER
Special to The News Journal

"Driving with Dvorak: Essays on Memory and Identity" (University of Nebraska Press, \$24.95) is a collection of personal essays about childhood by Delaware's former poet laureate. Fleda Brown writes about growing up in the '50s, an imperfect family, marriage, anxiety and how one fits into the world - in short, the sort of material memoir is always made of. What makes these essays special, though, is Brown's particular grace, and the poet's confidence in the cinema of detail to direct mood and meaning straight to the heart.

As her poems often do, Brown's essays descend into the weirdness right when we least expect it. In "Where You Are," a piece about trying for the nth time to fathom her unreachable father, Brown cleans out his basement.

"How to calculate where limbo ends and utter damnation begins? On top, the layer as tall as I am, are limp and bent cardboard boxes stuffed with filthy rags, chenille bedsprads, unused paper cups and plates; an old mixer; a meat grinder; empty glass bottles; glass bottles filled with what used to be plum preserves; two rotten canvas tents ... the upper reaches, disturbed, shift and collapse."

Further down, Brown continues.

"I will never get this right. He'll slip away again. I'll be as exact as his example taught me to be: I'll list the objects, touch their hard edges with the edges of my words. They'll nudge each other, winking at what's unsaid between them. They know this is about me, still trying to find a parent, some point of origin under the rubble."

This thorny relationship with her father is a recurrent theme throughout "Driving with Dvorak." Brown has been amazed at the volume of feedback she has received on this topic.

"I suspect that a large number of us successful 50-60-plus-year-old women succeeded by emulating our fathers," she says. "That was the generation. And that always meant ambivalent feelings about our fathers - wanting to BE them, but hating it that they were dominant in the culture."

The ease and subtlety with which Brown here takes a pile of junk and reshuffles it into commentary - about writing as a last-ditch effort to make sense of this baffling relationship - are both typical and astonishing.

"What is happiness," she asks, "but the nest we make for ourselves out of the tangle of troubles?"

By the time I finished reading this book, I realized that whatever Fleda thought she was writing, she was still writing poetry. Thank goodness.

Abby Millager is one of the White Clay Poets. She received a Delaware Division of the Arts Emerging Artist Fellowship in Poetry in 2009.

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Former Delaware poet laureate Fleda Brown reading and signing two books, "Driving with Dvorak: Essays on Memory and Identity" and her new book of poems: "Loon Cry."



Fleda Brown

EVENT ONE: Feb. 6, 3 p.m., Kent County Library, 497 S. Red Haven Lane, Dover; 698-6440

EVENT TWO: Feb. 7, 7 p.m., Lewes Public Library, 111 Adams Ave., Lewes; 645-2733

EVENT THREE: Feb. 9, 5:30 p.m. (reception to follow), University of Delaware, Department of English; for details, e-mail english@udel.edu

Taste: Creamy, smooth, fun

FROM PAGE E1

favorite brand of ice cream, Turkey Hill?

"I don't know, maybe," she said. "The flavor was pretty good. There are many nuts."

It was kind of stuffy in the Bob, and the vanilla helped her partner, a 4-year-old expert in the field of frozen treats, cool down. But how did it taste?

"It tastes like vanilla," she said.

Those two flavors, as well as the mint chocolate chip, were all creamy and smooth and, most importantly and least surprisingly, fresh. And how could they not be - the milk for the ice cream comes from cows so close that they're practically YouDee's neighbors.

That freshness immediately jumped out at Debbie Ziomek as she tried the ice cream for the first time during that Jan. 19 game, which she was attending with her boys Matthew, 9, and Michael, 12.

"I love it," said Ziomek, who lives in Elkton, Md. "Usually, I wouldn't eat ice cream in the winter."

Linda Somers, who lives in Newark and works at UD, said she had first tried the ice cream at Ag Day and couldn't pass up a chance to have some more, regardless of the season.

"It's really creamy," she said.

Cones cost \$3 at the stand, and at the Jan. 19 game six flavors were available: Creamsicle, black raspberry, peach, vanilla, butter pecan and mint chocolate chip.

The ice cream is available at the creamery, which is at 531 S. College Ave., next to Townsend Hall, in bulk 3 gallon containers for \$30. But aside from Vita Nova, the university's student-run restaurant that's part of the Alfred Learner College of Business and Economics, basketball games (men or women) at the Bob are the only retail outlet for the ice cream.

It's part of a popular two-year-old program called Hoops and Scoops that's drawing well at



The News Journal/WILLIAM BRETZGER

Matthew Ziomek, 9, savors a mint chocolate chip cone at the UDairy Creamery during a UD men's basketball game.

games right now despite the frigid and snowy season and the smaller student and faculty population during winter session, said Melinda Litvinas, who took over as manager of the creamery at the end of last year.

"We don't stop for about five minutes before half-time to 10 minutes into the second half," Litvinas said. "I think it's becoming more of an attraction to come to the game, because (fans) know right now that's the only place you can get it."

That will change in April, when UDairy's 2,000-square-foot standalone store next to the Rust Ice Arena on Del. 896 opens for

business.

The store will sell cones as well as pints and half-gallons, Litvinas said. Pints will also be available at campus marts.

But that's about as far as the retail expansion will go.

"We're a university entity," Litvinas said. "We're trying to just keep our mission as a college program, not a Ben & Jerry's. We don't want to compete with other dairy farms that have already been supportive of us."

Lauren and Natalie Bothum contributed to this article. Contact Peter Bothum at 324-2885 or pbothum@delawareonline.com.

Style: 'I know what fits'

FROM PAGE E1

York, I'd probably dress in all Diesel clothes ... but I'm a little too old for that."

Weekend wear: "I wear jeans and a nice turtleneck sweater or shirt. I love jackets," he said. "I know what fits me well. I like short-waisted jackets."

All or nothing: "I'm a dress-up suit or jeans guy. My nightmare is corporate casual," Meldrum said. "I want to either be dressed up or dressed down."

But he has his limits: "I don't wear sweatpants."

Copy the French: "I love the ways the Europeans shop ... just have a few really good outfits. I like buying really good clothes. To me it is worth the money. If you buy really good, classic, tailored clothes, you can wear them forever."

His advice: "Figure out what looks good on you and stick with it." But be realistic. "I don't think anybody looks good in bellbottoms." He said people should "stick to the basics and use accessories to spruce yourself up, things like belts."

Current trend that doesn't cut it: "The whole ripped jeans thing ... it seems contrived."

Wardrobe staples: "Good black jeans, a really good Versace suit - black or navy blue - windowpane shirts and high-quality ties."

Fashion regrets: "There is a picture of me floating around somewhere [in which] I have on baby blue bellbottoms and a white turtleneck ... I went through a long hair stage



The News Journal/JENNIFER CORBETT

George Meldrum wears a Versace suit, Dolce & Gabbana shirt, Saks tie, Cole Haan shoes and glasses from Peter Kate.

when I was younger." It could have been worse. "I never got into leisure suits, thank God, and I avoided polyester."

Why fashion matters: "It's an expression of how you feel about yourself and how you fit in to the community and what you feel comfortable in, how you express yourself. For me, more than anything, it's more about comfort - what am I comfortable in?"

"If you really want to look good, you want to look really distinctive. If

everybody dressed the same, it would be pretty damn boring."

Style Files runs weekly in SundayLife. To suggest someone stylish to feature - your co-worker, teacher, daughter or even yourself - please send information about them to stylefiles@delawareonline.com and include daytime contact information.

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