

Blair School of Music hosts the Serafin String Quartet

A musical exchange established by lifelong friends

By **Corinne Fombelle** - April 6, 2017 VANDERBILT HUSTLER



The Blair School of Music String Department has welcomed the Serafin String Quartet for a week of musical exchange, which will culminate in a collaborative concert this Friday night. The Serafin String Quartet, which is in residence at the University of Delaware, derived its name from the maker of violinist Kate Ransom's 1728 instrument. The Hustler had the chance to meet with Ransom as well as Dr. Connie Heard, Professor of Violin and Chair of the Strings Department at Blair, to talk about their musical history and the upcoming concert.

The two violinists have a long-standing friendship that led to the idea of visiting and guest teaching at each other's schools. Their parents knew each other, and Ransom's family actually moved into Heard's family's former home in Cambridge, Massachusetts when they were both toddlers. However, they both trace back the true beginning of the friendship to junior high school through musical activities. Both are alumnae of the Blair Academy, and they played in the Nashville Youth Symphony together during high school. Even after separately leaving Nashville for college and graduate school, they were able to reconnect through playing in the New Haven Symphony Orchestra and have remained in touch ever since.



Cornelia Heard



Kate Ransom

Ransom previewed what the audience can expect from the program on Friday night, which includes the Serafin String Quartet's performance of Haydn's *Quartet Op. 77, No. 1* and Mendelssohn's *Quartet Op. 44, No. 1*.

"It's always a treat for us to program Haydn as the grandfather of this wonderful body of repertoire. It's amazing that he was the originator of the idea of writing a lot of works for this formation—two violins, viola, and cello—because he's such a master," said Ransom.



The Blair String Quartet

Additionally, the ensemble will double in size for Mendelssohn's *Octet in E-flat Major, Op. 20*. The octet will be comprised of the Serafin String Quartet and members of the Blair String Quartet—three current members as well as former member Kathryn Plummer substituting for the injured John Kochanowski.

“It’s one of the most exuberant pieces in the world and written when Mendelssohn was sixteen. It’s always a joy to get to play it,” said Heard.

Ransom echoed Heard’s sentiments about the Mendelssohn and described her experience of the joy of playing in a quartet and an octet.

“I think of the string quartet as an amazing conversation. It’s a conversation that’s been scripted by the composer, but we get to have that conversation. And then when you double that, it’s like a party with eight great people having the most lively conversation,” said Ransom.

Heard and Ransom both thrive in quartet playing and have been performing professionally for decades. The opening in the Blair String Quartet was what brought Heard back to Nashville shortly after she completed graduate school in New York City. Ransom returned to chamber music after pursuing other musical endeavors and realized how vital it was once she began again.

“It’s an enterprise that came out of the blue for me. And after I really got into it, I realized that although I wasn’t consciously missing or hankering for string quartets, it fills a huge place in my psyche and my life,” said Ransom.

Heard emphasized the invigorating opportunities available for students at Blair, the Serafin String Quartet being the third guest artist to present master classes in the last ten days.

“We are fortunate at Blair to have a relatively small school where the students can study music intensively. One of the ways the environment can be very stimulating is in having guests like this interact with the students,” said Heard.

The full week of working with students and teaching concludes with the concert on Friday, April 7th at 8 p.m. in Turner Recital Hall.