

TEACHING FROM EXPERIENCE

The string faculty at Utah State University takes on more than usual in 2008. Besides working as teachers, the members are also a professional string quartet and are preparing to present Utah's first complete Beethoven String Quartet Cycle.

A Beethoven Cycle is a performance of all 17 of Beethoven's quartets, which are representative of his most innovative and creative works and span the breadth of his career as a composer. A

typical quartet might perform the series over the course of a year, but USU's Fry Street Quartet will perform them all in just two weeks, from Oct. 2-11, 2008, in the Manon Caine Russell Kathryn Caine Wanlass Performance Hall.

"We're taking on this challenge because that's how we would want to experience it," said Rebecca McFaul, FSQ second violinist. "When it's done in such a short time, the listener can



William Fedkenheuer, first violin



Anne Francis, cello



Rebecca McFaul, second violin



Russell Fallstad, viola

experience a different kind of connection with Beethoven and with his music and can sense the scope of his extremes.”

Doing it this way also allowed the Department of Music to invite Beethoven expert and renowned scholar/pianist/media author Robert Winter to be a guest lecturer before each performance.

In addition to Winters’ pre-concert lectures, the FSQ secured a grant from the Marie Eccles Caine Foundation that will fund a companion USU Honors course, “The Arts in Cultural Context: Beethoven and Cultural Heritage.” The fall 2008 class will explore the music, life and legacy of Beethoven in a broad cultural context. It will initially focus on the string quartets and then consider Beethoven’s influence by studying trends in various disciplines, including music, history and politics, philosophy, literature, art and film.

“Not only will the audience be able to hear all 17 quartets in less than two weeks, it will also be able to gain knowledge to understand and appreciate the works of a man who has been a pivotal figure in music and who is still influencing us today — more than 200 years later,” McFaul said. “All these added dimensions to the cycle have really shaped it into an event with a festival atmosphere.”

The FSQ came to USU in 2002 and has had an impressive impact on the string program and the Cache Valley community.

Shortly after its arrival, the members saw the need for a pedagogy, or teaching, program that would benefit USU students and younger musicians in the community. They have been instrumental in setting up USU’s String Academy, a program that allows students to teach younger children how to play string instruments. Today there are approximately 80 String Academy students from 3 to 18 years old.

“While some students will go on to pursue higher education in musical performance or become members of a professional quartet, many will likely become private teachers and will need to know how to teach,” said William Fedkenheuer, FSQ first violinist. “When we graduated, none of us had any teaching experience, and it can be a challenge to

figure out how to teach a 3-year-old something you’ve taken for granted for so many years.”

This program is unique in the state of Utah and gives the young people of Cache Valley an opportunity that isn’t readily available to them due to the lack of full-time, certified music specialists working in the school districts.

“Because the USU String Academy is linked with the USU Music Department, it gives the children access to theory classes,” said Nina Jorgensen, parent of two String Academy students. “It also offers group lessons, which gives them opportunities to see other children, to play together, review pieces and it just makes it more fun. I really value the Fry Street Quartet’s involvement in the community and the chance they give us to inspire our kids.”

The FSQ was born in 1997 in Chicago when McFaul and violist Russell Fallstad decided to pursue a professional quartet career. After finding two more members, they traveled to Israel as one of two groups from the United States to participate in Isaac Stern’s *Encounters* Chamber Music Seminar. There, they studied with Stern as well as with luminaries such as Leon Fleischer and members of the Emerson and Juilliard quartets. As a result of that experience, the group was invited to give its Carnegie Hall debut and participate in the Carnegie Fellows Program.

While it is unusual for a community the size of Logan to have a string quartet residency, Logan is unique in its great support for the arts. When the university was first established, many local newspapers referred to the area as the “Athens of the West.”

“The kind of impact you can have on a community this size versus a place like Chicago is amazing,” Fedkenheuer said. “The Cache Valley audience is sophisticated, made up of astute listeners who are really ready to go to the next level — to experience a Beethoven Cycle.”

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