

Sampling four centuries of chamber music with a purpose



St. Lawrence String Quartet

Photo provided

By Sophie Braccini

Four Bay Area chamber music organizations are pooling their inspiration thanks to the initiative of Pamela Freund-Striplen, the leader of the Lafayette-based Gold Coast Chamber Players. The new entity, called the Bay Area Music Consortium, not only creates an economy of scale by inviting quality musicians, but unites their sensibilities by formulating unique, inspired programming. The first BAMC production will open the series in Lafayette on Feb. 9 with a highly spiritual concert interweaving four pieces from four different centuries per-

formed by the renowned St. Lawrence String Quartet.

Freund-Striplen recalls how it all started a year and a half ago, during one of her solitary brainstorming sessions, when she realized that other local chamber groups she knew had different audiences, but similar personalities – and that it would be beneficial to band together to nurture, rather than compete.

Freund-Striplen approached Tiffany Loewenberg, director of the San Francisco-based Noe Valley Chamber Orchestra, and she was immediately on board and excited. Subsequently, they invited two other direc-

tors, Berkeley Chamber Performances’ Joanne De Phillips and Mill Valley Chamber Music Society’s Bill Horne to reflect on the different paths this alliance could take.

The four directors agreed to offer annual concerts with programming that would present their shared unique artistic vision. Gold Coast Players director says that her mission was to convince the other three that together they could create something unique. She sees BAMC as a metaphor of chamber music itself, where the whole is more than the sum of its individual parts.

The Feb. 9 concert will

feature “The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind” by contemporary Argentinian composer Osvaldo Golijov. Freund-Striplen explains that the music is a very impactful piece, a rich exploration of Jewish history. Isaac The Blind, who eight centuries ago was the great kabbalist rabbi of Provence (France), was the Golijov’s inspiration behind the music for clarinet and the string quartet. Golijov wrote that the movements of (his) work sound as if written in three of the different languages spoken by the Jewish people throughout history, the prelude and the first movement, the most ancient, in Aramaic; the second movement is in Yiddish, the rich and fragile language of a long exile; the third movement and postlude are in sacred Hebrew. It is considered by some to be one of the greatest pieces in the clarinet repertoire in this century.

It seemed logical for Freund-Striplen to invite the St. Lawrence String Quartet to play this piece as it has had a long association with the composer. She adds that if it was not for the creation of the BAMC, Gold Coast would not have had the means to work with such a renowned quartet.

Freund-Striplen met with the quartet’s cellist, Chris Costenza, and they

brainstormed win-win ideas to compose the entire program. The quartet has recorded all of Haydn string quartets (see Tex Talk by the quartet about “The Humor of Haydn” www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-VaqBtWu_u0). Together the two musicians thought of a crescendo of spiritual music, starting with Tango alla Zingaresca (2016) by Bay Area composer Jonathan Berger (who will be at the concert), followed by Franz Joseph Haydn’s String Quartet in D, Op. 20, No. 4 (1772), and to end the first part of the concert, the third movement of Beethoven’s String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132 (1825), which bears the title Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an der Gottheit (Holy song of thanksgiving of a convalescent to the Deity).

Freund-Striplen, who says that she will come to all of the four concerts as a spectator and not a musician this time around, adds that this unique concert will sample four centuries of chamber music in a meaningful way.

Gold Coast Chamber concerts at the Lafayette Library Community Hall often sell out, so tickets should be bought in advance. The Feb. 9 concert will start at 7:30 p.m. with a pre-talk by Kai Christensen at 7 p.m.

Info: <http://gcplayers.org>

Lynn’s Top Five

Your January financial planning checklist

By Lynn Ballou CFP®

Do you make New Year’s resolutions? Turns out that although many of us do, studies indicate that far less than half of us will succeed in accomplishing them! So instead of making some resolutions we may never actually achieve, let’s take a different view and create a First of Year Financial Planning Checklist that we can review and complete, and then get on with our new year feeling accomplished. Here’s your list:

1) Paycheck review time. Whether it’s a pension check, Social Security check or your paycheck, there are things that require your attention. On all, be sure you are on track with your withholding. Sometimes a new year means new math is needed, especially in light of all the tax law changes. And if you are an employee, be sure you are maximizing 401(k) contributions and that you are fully taking advantage of all available benefits at your firm that you can use such as pre-tax savings plans.

2) Titling review and beneficiary checkup. Did you open new investment accounts recently, purchase a home or refinance? Did you

set up or change your living trust? Take a look at your accounts and real estate holdings to be sure they are titled in line with your estate planning documents. And extremely important, revisit your beneficiaries listed on your retirement accounts as well as life insurance policies. If you have a change in your marital status or new children, this is an especially high priority action.

3) Budget time! Take a look at your actual spending for last year compared to what you had planned to spend. If you were off track, it’s time to make some adjustments. The quickest way to sink your future plans for financial independence can be to ignore real spending and just hope it all works out. Make a plan and follow the plan.

4) Simplify your life by reducing excess accounts, credit lines and credit cards, and check up on your credit reports. Consolidate multiple bank and investment accounts if you can, unless there’s a legal need or other convenience need to keep them all open. If you have more than two or three credit cards, why? You may be earning fewer points or reward dollars than you could. Good idea: an extra

credit card in case one is compromised while you await the replacement. Bad idea: too many. Get rid of the unnecessary cards and keep only those that provide you with tangible financial rewards you can use anywhere, anytime. Also, if you have lines of credit that you once needed but no longer do, close them. If you aren’t sure what you have, run a free credit report on yourself and then get rid of what you don’t need. You can do an internet search for all the affordable and safe ways to run this type of report. This will also allow you to clean up any problems you may find on your credit report.

5) Update your financial plan so you know what this year’s primary goals should be. Whether you are a skilled planner or have a Certified Financial Planner already on your team, a great plan doesn’t end with its design. Like a garden your financial plan depends on you to nurture it. Review your plan, figure out what’s working, what’s not, where you are off track, where you are excelling, and make any necessary adjustments. Then follow through with all the actions needed to see results. Collaborate with your tax, estate

planning, investment and insurance pros to communicate the message, the goals, and to keep the team on track.

If my ideas aren’t specifically helpful in your own circumstances, take what works for you from my list, and then craft your own. Get it done now while the year is fresh and you will be off to a great start. Be sure to keep a copy to review again in January 2020 so you keep the momentum going every year, see results and stay on track. Wishing you a very Happy 2019!

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