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Prestigious music camp to kick off inaugural season

Public concerts on the itinerary

By JOHN ELLIOTT

In a community seeking to enhance its identity as a mecca of the arts, the upcoming Center Stage Strings concert series is a coup for Three Rivers because the newly created camp features a series of outstanding concerts. In addition, its virtuoso violinist director, Danielle Belen, is head-over-hills in love with Three Rivers!

Danielle said she can't believe how every detail has fallen into place. The camp and its passionate relationship with Three Rivers appear to be destined for success.

"There is already an electricity building around the camp and the music we will be playing," Danielle said. "[The camp] will be inspiring for all the musicians and the Three Rivers community."

There will be ample opportunity for the community to meet and get to know the 14 musicians who will be participating in the inaugural camp, which will be held June 14 to 20. Nine of the players are prodigy-like students; five are faculty and/or accompanists who are presently or might be described someday as icons of classical music.



DANIELLE BELEN

But the star of the camp is its founder, Danielle Belen. The 27-year-old violinist is as passionate about teaching music as she is about performing. Her camp concept borrows all the best from summer camps she has attended to create a hybrid Three Rivers rendition.

"This year's camp is definitely violin-heavy but that will change with time," Danielle said. "Next year, I hope to double the students and the instruments."

The expansion is critical to Danielle's mission as a teacher and to her own camp concept. The camp's priority is to focus on the student building technique and confidence as a soloist. But the expansion of the instruments and campers will create more chamber music opportunity for teaching and performing.

The relationship with the Three Rivers community will play a key role in the camp expansion and enduring success. That's where Bill Haxton, local arts advocate and tapped to be the development director of Center Stage Strings, has stepped up to the plate.

Bill met Danielle by pure happenstance when Danielle was in Three Rivers visiting her newly relocated parents. After striking a musical chord, Bill realized the classical music camp was an ideal way to place Three Rivers on yet another map of cultural places to visit.

It was Bill who arranged the venue at Community Presbyterian Church, garnered three scholarships for this year's campers, and assured Danielle from the outset that this was a marriage made in musical heaven.

For a natural scenic location, Danielle said, she couldn't have done better than staging the camp in Three Rivers, where artistry and mountain majesty literally leap out from around every bend in the road.

"Aesthetically, the church is beautiful and the acoustics are excellent," Danielle said. "The students will also be practicing and rehearsing at Harrison Hall... it's the perfect camp venue."

The week-long (June 15-20) concert series will feature free student performances on Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, and Sunday at Community Presbyterian Church. Saturday's "Faculty Recital" is the camp's highlight; admission is \$10.

Tickets for Saturday's recital are available at Chump's Videos and DVDs or at the door.

For more information about the camp, visit www.centerstagestrings.com or call Bill Haxton, 561-0300.