

Center Stage Strings Trio finales in Three Rivers

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By Donald Munro / The Fresno Bee

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In small towns, it's easy to bump into people. Three Rivers resident Bill Haxton crossed paths earlier this year with violinist Danielle Belen, a faculty member at the prestigious Colburn School in Los Angeles. (Her parents live in Three Rivers.) They compared notes -- he's an enthusiastic local music booster, she's a prominent violin teacher who wanted to start a summer camp for prodigies -- and before they knew it, an amazing little musical event was born.

That event has been taking place this week in Three Rivers in homespun style. At the core is the Center Stage Strings music camp for young prodigy violinists. Nine students from the U.S., Bulgaria, Korea and Vietnam are receiving instruction from world-class instructors, including Robert Lipsett at Colburn.

Most of those students and instructors -- who are being hosted in the homes of town residents -- are giving public concerts all week.

Two concerts remain:

– The Center Stage Strings Trio, featuring Belen on violin, Diego Miralles on cello and Jennie Jung on piano, will perform 7 p.m. Saturday. Admission is \$10; buy tickets at centerstagestrings.com.



SPECIAL TO THE BEE Danielle Belen will play violin this weekend as part of the Center Stage Strings Trio. Buy tickets at centerstagestrings.com.

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– A finale concert featuring students and faculty will be held 5 p.m. Sunday. Admission is free.

Both concerts are at the Three Rivers Community Presbyterian Church, 43410 Sierra Drive, Three Rivers.

For Haxton, the chance meeting with Belen was an opportunity to raise the town's musical horizons to a new level. For nearly a decade, Haxton has been involved with the the Three Rivers Concert on the Grass, an annual event held the last Saturday in September. The concert has been a tradition since 1981.

"I love doing this," Haxton says of his involvement with Center Stage Strings. "I really wanted to improve the music scene in Three Rivers."

Belen, meanwhile, was able to round up an impressive roster of students and teachers, including Lipsett -- a giant name in the violin pedagogy world. He'll offer a master class for students at 4 p.m. today; it's open to the public and admission is free.

"He really is regarded as the foremost teacher of violin on the planet," Haxton says of Lipsett.

Also involved: 13-year-old Simone Porter, who recently performed with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in London, and 17-year-old William Hagen, who is heading to Juilliard to study with Itzhak Perlman.

Though plans are still tentative, there is talk of making the camp an annual event and perhaps establishing a winter concert series in the town.

The community has embraced the music camp and the concerts, Haxton says. At Tuesday's first concert featuring Hagen, a capacity crowd was on hand at the 250-seat church.

"Ten percent of the population of Three Rivers came out," he says with a laugh.

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