

One-third of piano trio, BARBARA THIEM, talks CHAMBER MUSIC

On cello, Barbara Thiem has noticed some differences between US and international audiences

By Eli Pace
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From international tours to performances where they live and work in Fort Collins, Colorado, The Mendelssohn Trio has been entertaining audiences now for nearly 40 years.

The name of the group comes from German-born cellist Barbara Thiem's great-grandfather, Franz von Mendelssohn. He was a nephew of Felix Mendelssohn and an important supporter of the arts in Berlin during the early 20th century, according to the trio's biography.

Rounding out the trio are Erik Peterson on violin and Theodor Lichtmann on piano, and all three members of the trio are professors at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, where they perform in concert and work with students on chamber music projects.

In addition to their performances in the U.S., the trio has played on international tours, including several in Europe. The latest came in 2012 with an appearance at the International Mendelssohn Festival in Berlin.

While performing the standard repertoire of the 18th and 19th century compositions, the trio also makes efforts to introduce their audiences to works by more modern composers of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Tickets for Sunday's concert can be purchased online at SummitMusicAndArts.org or by calling (970) 389-5788. They are \$20 in advance or \$25 at the door, but because of a partnership between Summit Music and Arts and the Summit County Rotary Club students and their parents will get in free.

"Summit Music and Arts has always provided free tickets to students as part of our mission," SMA artistic director Len Rhodes said in a news release.

"However, we realize some parents may be unable to find the funds to accompany their children."

Summit Daily News: You have a violinist, a cellist and a pianist. Why those three instruments? Tell me about the dynamics of the trio.

Barbara Thiem: The most common forms for chamber music are the string quartet, which has two violins, a viola and cellist — it's all strings and many composers are looking for that combination — and then we have the piano trio, which has two strings and one piano. It's quite a different animal because the piano is such a dominate instrument and different from the string instruments.

It's always a little bit of two strings against the piano. Essentially, this piano trio is like three soloists playing together. It means that each voice gets a fuller attention, and then the strings work together. It's developed through the centuries.

SDN: With Erik Peterson from the U.S., you being born in Germany and Theodor Lichtmann coming from Switzerland, you truly are an international trio. What is it like working with three people who grew up in such different environments?

BT: We've all been in this country a long time. I came for graduate school and have lived here, but (Theodor and I) both spend our summers in Europe, so we haven't lost touch with the Old Country.

But you bring up an important point because I have had some problems working in chamber music with American musicians.



SUBMITTED

The Mendelssohn Trio — with Erik Peterson on violin, cellist Barbara Thiem and Theodor Lichtmann on piano — will perform a range of classic and more modern compositions on Sunday in Dillon.

In Europe, I'm used to being clear and straightforward about what needs to be worked on. Americans always feel a little too personally involved. I'm not trying to criticize them personally; I'm criticizing the music. I have to watch that. ... But it's easy to play with (Theodor, who's) another European. We've switched violins a couple times, where the two of us have always been in the trio since the beginning.

SDN: So you two have been playing together in the trio since 1988. Do you find Theodor still finds ways to surprise you?

BT: You know, the different music we work on is surprising, and so our way of interpreting it can be different each time. We've actually been playing together since 1980. We didn't have a trio then, but we played concerts together.

SDN: You play a lot of 18th and 19th century

classics, but also aim to introduce new audiences to more modern 20th and 21st century pieces. How would you describe the differences between styles of the two time periods?

BT: The classical audience seems to really like the romantic and the classical periods, but the 20th century music has a lot of compositions, and we have to gently put them between the ones people like. This time, we're actually playing a piece that's going out on a limb for us too, because it's written for a jazz style that we don't normally have to play. We are all struggling a little with that, but it's a great piece so we're hoping it's going to work out OK.

In general, the 20th and 21st centuries have done a lot of melting of different styles, and this is one of the pieces that's done in that way. It's classical and jazz put together in the same piece, a cross-over

IF YOU GO

What: The Mendelssohn Trio

When: 4 p.m., Sunday

Where: Dillon Community Church, 371 La Bonte St., Dillon

Info: Doors open at 3 p.m. for an artist exhibition and the concert starts at 4 p.m. Tickets can be purchased at SummitMusicAndArts.org or by calling (970) 389-5788. They are \$20 in advance or \$25 at the door. Students and parents get in free.

between different styles.

SDN: Do you have a favorite?

BT: I don't think that's a good question. I like everything I get into. When you work on a piece, you start to enjoy it very much. I don't like one more than another. When you perform them, you have to be super convinced of all of them.

SDN: When you play for international crowds, is there anything you do differently than when you play in Fort Collins or the U.S.?

BT: We don't do anything differently, but the kind of reaction is very different. I always feel that

the American audience, generally speaking, is a little hesitant committing to an opinion. You don't have that problem in Europe. They always have an opinion. They trust their own judgment, and they will let you know — with clapping or other ways — if they like something or not. They always have a very clear opinion.

SDN: What's your favorite part of performing for an audience?

BT: It's transmitting the message that I have on the piece. I want to be very clear with what I want to say about a piece and make it come alive for the audience.