



Brendon Elliott: connecting with music

Violinist Brendon Elliott is no stranger to the Virginia classical scene. Originally from Newport News, Brendon attended the best music schools in the US and is currently a member of the New World Symphony in Miami. He has performed as soloist with both the Richmond Symphony Orchestra and the Virginia Symphony. CMSCVA is thrilled to welcome Brendon back to Virginia for our opening concerts in the 2018-19 season.

CMSCVA. Can you name the first piece of music, performance or person that inspired you to take up an instrument, or to become a professional musician?

B.E. I can't mark any one individual moment as inspirational. However, I can say that playing with my family quartet at a young age helped me see how musicians can play all over the country, and the world. Although I was usually practicing myself, having the Virginia Symphony close by was also amazing in that I could see musicians anytime I chose in the halls nearby. I don't think I would be a musician if I did not have that influence. The concertmaster, Vahn Armstrong, was my teacher in high school. Without his support I might not have auditioned for the conservatories that I was lucky to go to. Being a semi-finalist at the Sphinx competition was also comforting, in that I saw other minorities who were amazing musicians and also pursuing this path.



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CMSCVA. What is the most memorable chamber music experience you’ve ever had, and why?

B.E. Despite playing with many groups in my student life, it would be hard to top playing Dvorak’s Bass Quintet with cellist Peter Wiley from the Guarneri String Quartet and my peers from the Curtis Institute of Music. After the concert Mr. Wiley told us he made a few mistakes the rest of the group probably did not notice. He added “As you get older, you still make mistakes but they are harder to notice.” I hope I one day get to the point I can make inaudible mistakes!

CMSCVA. What can you do as a performer to truly reach an audience member through performance? Or what do you think a listener should take away from a performance?

B.E. I’m a big believer that music has its deepest connection to a listener when the performer is expressing something quite personal through their art form.

For every performer, the process of infusing a performance with genuine emotions is different. It can also be difficult if they can’t find a genuine connection to the music they are asked to play or sing. I don’t like telling a listener what to listen for, and I always try my best not to sway someone’s perception of music one way or another.

CMSCVA. What is the role of a “classical” musician today, and how do you think it’s changed?

B.E. The musical landscape for everyone has changed. At this point in time, the fact that one doesn’t need to go to a local theater or concert hall to be entertained means that we musicians have to entice people to come to us. We need to bring in a new audience that is unfamiliar with the standard repertoire. We need to become entrepreneurs considering the many school systems that don’t see importance in music education, and because of the lack of orchestral jobs. We also must reflect a rapidly changing society while finding time to be ourselves.

Where we were once doing the community a service, we need to realize that our audience does us a great service by attending our events and being engaged with us. How we can better facilitate that process is key. It's important ask ourselves what we can do differently than the musicians that fill our radio stations and malls. Classical musicians do have the power to transform our communities, and we need find ways to coexist with our audience more now than ever.



CMSCVA. What music are you listening to right now?

B.E. I have finally heard Schoenberg's Verklarte Nacht since I'm performing it at New World Symphony this weekend. My mind gets stuck on how great it is everyday after rehearsal. Lately I've been listening to some old-school albums. For any rap fans out there I would recommend Diggable Planets "Reachin'" and Illa J's Yancey Boys. Some not for the faint of heart - Slick Rick and Mobb Deep's breakout album - are also on rotation, alongside the more verbally tame grunge rock classic SuperUnknown by Soundgarden and Mac Demarco's calming Salad Days. Another classical piece I'm currently enamored with is Prokofiev's "5 Melodies for Violin and Piano," particularly in David Oistrakh and Frida Bauer's recording. Fritz Kreisler's recording of his own string quartet is a favorite (you can find it on spotify) - it's some of the most beautiful violin and chamber playing I've ever heard. Then some Bill Evans sprinkled throughout of all that.

Brendon Elliott makes his CMSCVA debut this September 29 playing chamber music by Brahms, Shostakovich and Golijov. Click below for details.

[Shostakovich and War 1: Saturday Sept. 29, 2:00pm](#)

[Dreams and Prayers: Sunday Sept. 30, 4:00pm](#)