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Heather Kurzbauer

## Of Demons and Dreams: Storioni Festival 2016

MEMBER

January 26, 2016, 4:12 PM · Take a walk down memory lane to a summer day at the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, Yale School of Music's intensive chamber music program for young professionals. The year is 1996, the coaches impressive, the repertoire intense and the feeling of camaraderie amongst the musicians superlative. Three Dutch musicians, violin and cello siblings Wouter and Marc Vossen and pianist Bart van de Roer decided to take the plunge: the Storioni Trio was born.



*The Storioni Trio.*

Ever youthful, ever optimistic, the group underscores, "our goals then were the same as they are now: keep growing, keep discovering and take as many listeners as possible along with us on our journey." Within less than a decade, the Storioni Trio was on its way to a successful career what with a busy concert agenda, an impressive collection of cds and glowing reviews. Offering reflections on the roots of the **Storioni Festival**, an eleven-day celebration of the sound and the fury of music old and new, violinist Wouter Vossen muses, "we worked intensively together, delved into masses of repertoire and as our paths crossed with likeminded musicians we asked ourselves, why not bring them home to Brabant?"

Eindhoven, the festival's home base, lies in North Brabant, a Dutch province famed for its carnival madcap antics and southern hospitality. Tongue-in-cheek humor, an appreciation for creativity and a strong work ethic are three elements that have put the province on the map in terms of industrial might and design fame. Inspired by their surroundings, the Storioni Trio emphasizes enjoyment and education, the sheer pleasure of bringing the message of the familiar and the unfamiliar home to an audience who seems more like a family than an assembly of strangers.

How do you 'grow' a family? Settling down for a few words with the artists between seemingly nonstop rehearsals, the trio shares insights on music making and festival development. "Obviously your local constituents will show

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affection for three 'local boys who have made good', however, that is not enough to grow a festival for nine consecutive years. Our link to the community and sense for what is true and valuable both musically and personally has contributed to the evolution of new ideas. If you want young people to learn to love music, you have to go beyond the idea the standard youth concert. We decided to give workshops to schoolchildren, not just the super talents. All participants regardless of level are invited to perform in the concert hall so that their learning process becomes ours. On another level, we realized that the best way to motivate conservatory students is to give them the chance to compete in a healthy way. The winners of this year's Storioni competition have the chance to work with a leading Dutch actor in a theatrical musical performance." Not your standard fare by any means.

A triptych created by the 16th century Brabant-born enigmatic painter, Hieronymus Bosch, lent the 9th edition of the Storioni Festival fertile ground for thematic spin offs and one great name: Dreams and Demons. What could possibly be better than a visual riot of monsters and maidens, hallucinations and delusions: The Garden of Earthly Delights? Bosch's rich thematic material grants the liberty to open festival programming to many extremities In terms of regular concert fare; Rebecca Clarke songs and the Penderecki Sextet usually do not share the stage with Tartini's Devil's Trill and the Franck Piano Quartet. But in a festival inspired by the surreal, there are no limits to the imagination. Or as a random audience member enthused, "music that takes me back to an emotional place that I had long forgotten, keeps me coming back year in and year out."

Although the accent is on music making, camaraderie and friendship take a close second place. As Wouter Vossen elucidates, "a trio is not a quartet; there is no second violin, no real ego issue as to 'who is the soloist, or who is more important' I think this may answer the question as to how a trio can interact musically with so many different instruments in the course of a short period of time without becoming the dominant factor." And, considering the festival's Dutch roots, a good cup of coffee combined with an educational musical escapade is also part of the program.

No small player in the world of international music festivals, the Storioni's adventure has welcomed the likes of Gidon Kramer and Vadim Repin in years past. This year's constellation of stars granted Krzysztof Penderecki pride of place as composer-in-residence: from Agnus Dei for chamber orchestra to his delightful Serenata for three cellos written as a birthday gift for life-partner Elzabieta in 2008, his works spun their way through Storioni Festival 2016.

Of the many highpoints during the opening weekend, a shimmering performance of the Penderecki Sextet stands out as the Storioni's found a superlative balance within the context of the composition's expressionistic mix of pathos and virtuosity. Monika Leskovař's gut wrenching interpretation of Penderecki's Capriccio per Siegfried Palm rocked the hall. In an afternoon devoted to bringing local competition winners together, Benjamin Marquise Gilmore (violin) and Ella van Poucke (cello) deserve special mention for sheer expressive variation and strong emotional involvement in an unforgettable rendition of Saint-Saens' early Piano Quartet with the laudable Festival regular, Marianna Shirinyan at the piano.

The only regret one could possibly raise with regard to the Storioni Festival 2016 is the inability for one person to attend all the musical offerings presented as concerts take place simultaneously in multiple venues. Perhaps one of the surreal creatures in Bosch's curious cosmos would have been able to divide and absorb all. This happy listener will have to relish the pleasures of musical memory.

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