In honor of the string quartet

by Rob DeNunzio
Music Conservatory Director

This past October’s “Vivaldi at San Domenico” concert, like the thirty-three performances which have preceded it every year, was presented to an audience made up of our families, friends, and beloved donors, but in a way unlike the Orchestra da Camera has been previously assembled. Each of the pieces presented was derived from a string quartet—the same chamber ensemble configuration that the Virtuoso Program was borne of, when founder Faith France found supporters to lend their assistance nearly 35 years ago to four young music students in the form of scholarships. And as such, we did not have a single “concertmistress” or individual section leaders, but instead gave each student the challenge of leading their own section for one piece on the program. It was a performing challenge that would have been nearly impossible were it not for the depth to which chamber music is incorporated still into the Virtuoso Program curriculum, and for the passionate artist faculty on hand to coach the ensembles and sections every week.

It was a skillful demonstration of a quality of leadership that we aim to imbue in all Virtuoso Program students, a quality that serves them well not only in their music studies, but in the roles they take on elsewhere on campus and in the community at large, whether it’s being head prefect of the dorms, the lead in the school play, a star athlete, or the organizer of a student charity organization. It comes as no surprise then, when alumnae return with news of their successes, alongside all the tales of burgeoning careers in performing arts, there are just as many achievements in business, medicine, law, and beyond.

Another key to empowering the young women in our program to be leaders is the power of strong role models, which is why we’re excited to be presenting our second annual “Women in Music” concert this coming March. Between the interaction with our guest artists and the fascinating histories behind these composers that have been mostly shrouded from the mainstream musical arena, there will surely be much to learn about taking risks, accepting challenges, and following your heart. I sincerely hope you can join us.

Save the date!

Please join us on Sunday, March 11, 2012 for our second annual “Women in Music” Virtuoso Program Benefit Concert

Highlighting works by female musicians from throughout history and around the world, and featuring the Virtuoso Program’s Orchestra da Camera, this concert is sure to inspire you with the vibrant artistry and incredible biographies of these composers of lesser-performed works. Special guests and premieres of new music make this concert one you won’t want to miss.

The concert begins at 3:00 p.m. and will be followed by a light reception. Make sure you’re on our mailing list so that you receive an official invitation as the day of the event gets closer!

Virtuoso Program founder Faith France and husband Hugo Rinaldi enjoy the sun outside the Carol Franc Buck Hall of the Arts before Vivaldi 2011.
From the Podium
by Ann Krinitsky

A blast of good fortune—not to mention a strong tailwind from their previous stop in Honolulu—brought the Cavani Quartet to San Domenico two weeks before our Vivaldi concert, as we were putting on the final touches and feeling ripe for additional inspiration! The tremendously accomplished, ever popular and always entertaining foursome worked with our small ensembles and large orchestra, regaling them with stories about the composers that brought each piece into vivid color and clear relief, and offering nuggets of knowledge worth their weight in gold, such as:

- Look up at least once per measure;
- When playing, sit so that you can stand at any moment;
- In softer passages, play competitively softer than your stand partner;
- Piano can be thought of as an oil painting, while pianissimo may be thought of as a watercolor.

This masterful teaching had a tremendously positive effect on our students as we launched into Vivaldi week and received standing ovations from our audiences. Concert attendees commended the players’ unanimity of sound and approach as well as the interesting and unusual variety of pieces on the program.

Two of our ensembles performed their quartet movements as well as two orchestral works for the residents of the Aldersly retirement community in San Rafael the following Thursday as part of the work of Bread & Roses, an organization dedicated to bringing live music to the residents in institutions or who are otherwise isolated from society. Our students spoke a bit about their pieces and played the full ensemble works under the leadership of concertmistress Caitlin Gowdy.

A potentially disastrous but ultimately triumphant moment occurred when first violinist Elena Kim’s music fell to the floor, and—without missing a note—she continued to play from memory until her part was retrieved and placed back on her stand a good twenty seconds later. Three cheers for Elena, this month’s VP MVP!

Early November brought a novel collaboration between the Music Conservatory and Theatre Arts departments—a VP quartet performing incidental music for Sarah Ruhl’s Eurydice, an imaginative and contemporary retelling of the Greek myth “Orpheus and Eurydice”. To underscore Orpheus’ significant musical talent, director Beth Kellersmann and I worked together to adapt movements from current VP repertoire as well as add a few unusual surprises for the production, including Luis Bonfa’s Brazilian classic “Black Orpheus”, to underscore various dramatic moments. Offenbach’s Barcarolle, a boat song, also played an appropriate accompaniment to the substantial water symbolism in the play.

There is never a lack of opportunity for our students to take on performance challenges, and I’m proud to say they never shy away from all the chances they have to share their music with an audience!