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## Moonlight Duo on a musical mission

*(by Elizabeth Martin - June 18, 2008)*

"Music touches the heart and is a world language without words."

So says Claudia Baumgaertner Lemmerz of Pine Brook, mother of three and one half of The Moonlight Duo, a group whose mission is to bring classical music to people of all ages.

Lemmerz, who plays the piano in the group, along with the other half of The Moonlight Duo, Karen Pinoci, who plays the cello, have made it their mission to enrich the lives of seniors and young children alike, by bringing classical music, folk music and music by little known female composers to them.

When Pinoci and Lemmerz met in October of 2005, and something just "clicked" between the two of them.

"We had gotten together to play some chamber music, just for fun and immediately clicked, understood each other musically without words," said Lemmerz, "We wanted to bring music to people, who can't come to concerts that easily anymore, the older generation that grew up with classical music."

As such the duo focuses primarily on bringing their music to seniors whom, due to financial or physical limitations, are no longer capable of attending concerts.

Lemmerz feels strongly about their mission, "This generation grew up with classical music. These older people really appreciate classical music from their heart. They are the ones who went to concerts in their childhood with their parents. They were the ones filling the concert halls."



Appreciation from the duo's audience is resounding, frequently receiving thanks and praise from the over 60 senior homes at which they have performed.

Phyllis Sorkin of the B'Nai Jeshurun in Short Hills commented to the group, "The woman sitting next to me had not attended a concert in four years. She was overjoyed at being able to attend your performance. I am sure you will hear from her as well as from others who want you to be able to continue this work. Our warmest thanks and we look forward to being able to invite you to perform for us again and again."

In addition to the uplifting and educational work that the group does for seniors, they have also started a touring music program for preschoolers charmingly called, "Munchkin Music."

With this program the duo goes into preschools, exposes the children to orchestra instruments, teaches them a bit about music reading and even some ensemble playing for four and five year olds.

"By the end of our class, the 3- to 5-year-old children can identify about 20 different instruments by name and instrument group," Lemmerz stated. "We think that is amazing. We are hoping that the generation of young parents will pick up on this and expose their children to more classical music and concerts and encourages their own children to learn an instrument and enjoy the lifelong gift of music making."

"Our goal is to get young children excited about classical music and the orchestral instruments," Lemmerz said. "We bring in real instruments to our preschool classes. The kids can't wait to see, touch and lots of times try them out."

The education of young and old alike is an important aspect of The Moonlight Duo's mission. Their performances in senior homes could really be described as a concert/lecture.

"We believe that it is very important that our audience understands the history and events in a composer's life in order to understand and appreciate the music even more," noted Lemmerz.

This is especially important when performing pieces by relatively unknown, female composers, as the duo also enjoys doing.

"We found interesting stories about these women that we love to share with our audience, like Maria Theresia von Paradis, who lived in Mozart's time ... She had one big handicap: She was blind. And still had an amazing career as a pianist, composer and teacher."

Their programs typically include 10 to 12 composers, from a wide variety of countries. They incorporate pieces from well known performers, such as Bach, Tchaikovsky or Mendelssohn, along with folk songs and works by female composers.

The duo is currently preparing to take their interest in female composers even further by creating a program for next season entitled, "HERstory - Three Centuries of Women Composer History for Cello and Piano."

As important and satisfying as Lemmerz feels about their research and performing, it is the small moments that stick with her, "At the end of one of our concerts in April a lady came up to me crying and said she managed to hold herself together until the last piece we played, an arrangement of 'Amazing Grace.' She apologized for her tears but wanted to talk to me anyway. She loved all the selections, the variety of composers and especially our oral explanations to each piece. This had helped her to understand and feel the music even more. She told me, she had gone to hundreds of concerts with her husband before they moved into the senior home. Her husband had just died and the music is all that is left for her."

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Photos courtesy of Claudia Baumgaertner Lemmerz

Photo 1: Karen Pinoci, left, and Claudia Baumgaertner Lemmerz of Pine Brook are the Moonlight Duo.

Photo 2: The Moonlight Duo performing at Chelsea Senior Residence in Montville. Karen Pinoci plays the cello alongside Claudia Baumgaertner Lemmerz of Pine Brook, playing the piano.

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