Violinist makes home on Salt Spring



Violinist Joan Blackman enjoys an opportunity to perform outside at her new island home.

Joan Blackman adapts to island life

BY ELIZABETH NOLAN

DRIFTWOOD STAFF

Salt Spring's considerable draw for artists of all kinds has recently resulted in another choice musical acquisition for the island in the persons of Joan and Larry Blackman.

Larry is a viola player with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra and violinist Joan recently retired as the organization's associate concertmaster, a position that put her almost as close as one can get to the conductor. While her husband continues to commute to the city, staying work nights at a small pied-à-terre, Joan Blackman has embraced full-time island living.

Like many local inhabitants, it took just one visit for Blackman to realize Salt Spring was the place she'd always been looking for. A weekend on the island that included a night out at ArtSpring led to looking at real estate "for fun" and that led to falling in love with and pur-

"It was just kind of a leap of faith. And it's crazy when you think of it," Blackman said. "Musicians live in cities, because that's where the work is...But somethings drew us here."

Indeed, city living has helped Blackman forge important connections. She has performed and recorded as soloist with the Vancouver Symphony, Victoria Symphony, CBC Radio and Banff Festival orchestras. She is also a member of the acclaimed American String Project, which brings together concertmasters and soloists throughout North America.

That doesn't mean she's left the world of music behind, though. From her Salt Spring home Blackman continues to run the Vancouver-based Vetta Chamber Music and Recital Society, which she has been artistic director for since 2007. She is also taking performance dates and offering her teaching services to stu-

dents up and down Vancouver Island. In fact, though her children have grown up and are living productive adult lives of their own, Blackman's edging into retirement is markedly on the

Hard work has always been part of Blackman's personality. After growing up in Edmonton, she studied music at McGill University and then went to Vancouver to study under Gwen Thompson, the noted violinist and educator. Though she had always played chamber music, she soon took on a new role with the VSO.

"I played in the second violins and was as proud as can be to be in the orchestra," she recalled. "I was kind of naive. I just sort of believed you could just keep working and move forward."

"For the past eight or nine years my chamber music has been the thing that's kept me going."

JOAN BLACKMAN Professional violin player

In fact, it's rare for someone in the second violins to progress to the first, and even more unusual for someone to work up to the concertmaster level, but that is exactly what Blackman

"That was really fun for many years, and I miss it in many ways," Blackman said. At the same time, she noted, "For the past eight or nine years my chamber music has been the thing that's kept me going."

Blackman explained it's the intimacy and ability to share with the audience that makes the format so appealing.

"If I hear a sigh at the end of a movement, or make people cry, I know I've done my job," she said. "The orchestra is more about being part of a team and joining in a stream of music. You

FINE ART

Best work wanted for EAT show

Submission call made with February deadline

Salt Spring Island artists working in painting, sculpture and photography are invited to make submissions for the 10th annual edition of the Easter Art Tour.

A group show will run from Friday, March 25 through Sunday, April 3, 2016 at Mahon Hall, highlighting the best fine art Salt Spring

"No work is too large or too small, too expensive or too cheap, too old or too new," states the call for entries. "The only criteria is that it must be your very best work ever!'

Artists should submit a clear image, the dimensions of the piece and the date of the work by email to ssieasterarttour@gmail.com.

Deadline for submissions is Feb. 1, 2016.

The Easter Art Tour is a sponsored program of the Salt Spring Arts Council.

have to subsume yourself a little bit, so you have to be really willing for the sake of the music and the sake of the team. And the orchestra, in a way, is for young people because it takes a lot of energy and a lot of hours sitting there. Chamber music is where you really have a voice."

Vetta Chamber Music is celebrating its 30th anniversary season in 2015-16. A reunion concert with the ensemble's founders took place Oct. 1 and 2 and Angela Cheng will join the group for a blow-out season finale in Vancouver in April. The ensemble will have another special anniversary concert at ArtSpring on April 27 that features collaboration with aboriginal storyteller Rosemary Georgeson.

During her years as Vetta's artistic director, Blackman introduced a few new ideas such as tango along with the standard repertoire, something her loyal audience has taken in good faith.

"I have to sort of introduce people gently to different genres, and what I like is the audience I have there trusts my programming. They're willing to come and give it a try," Blackman said.

Blackman is still trying to determine exactly how she can share her music best with the local community and connect with like-minded people while living on an island, but in the meantime she's enjoying the slower pace. She and her husband had a luxurious summer off together, and their dog couldn't be happier.

"For a musician for whom music means everything, it's amazing to take time to garden or go swim in a lake," Blackman said.

"Living on Salt Spring has opened up a whole new world to me. People have a willingness to engage with each other. I had that in music, and now I'm learning to have that with people."





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