

White Oak Trio

<http://www.whiteoaktrio.org>



The Road Less Traveled—to the Top

In an assembly line age where accomplished musicians seem to put together chamber music performances at the drop of a hat, the White Oak Trio is a breath of fresh air. Pianist Meryl Ettelson, cellist Martha Lisle and violinist Steven McMillan are a phenomenon: an independent chamber music group making the time to be “at one”—at one with each other and with the music they perform. They

have chosen a complex but infinitely more rewarding path to musical success. It requires time. Says McMillan: “We stay busy with building new repertoire,

refining the depth of our understanding of old repertoire, and planning our commercial recording releases, concerts, master classes, and educational outreach presentations. We spend a lot of time on these. It is our feeling that our kind of music making requires quality time not just ‘fingers’. We discuss the music, ourselves, and spiritual growth. The layers are numerous.”

How does a chamber music group come together? Sometimes it’s marketing, pure and simple. World-famous personalities team up for an occasional (and expensive) public display. Sometimes a temporary group is put together to perform a particular piece. The results can be excellent, but are more often not deep or long-lived. Then sometimes it’s great fortune, synchronicity that brings a



group together. Individual musicians of quality who are on the lookout for musical “soul mates” find one another. That is the case with the White Oak Trio.

Ettelson began her chamber music career at the New School of Music in Philadelphia at the age of 11. Over the years, she played in many ensembles. It was at Indiana University, however, that she had the opportunity to work long enough with others to experience the understanding that can be attained between artists. While her ensuing performance career took her into many venues with artists of varying caliber, it was not until she en-

countered the talented young violinist, Steven McMillan, that she found a musical partner. The two met while Ettelson was in charge of chamber music at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas, and the 16 year old McMillan was acting as concertmaster of the Del Mar Orchestra. Through the following years, they developed an intimacy of expression that is seldom heard. In 2004, Ettelson and McMillan encountered the remarkable cellist, Martha Lisle, while presenting the works of Ned Rorem at the University of Houston. Lisle played the difficult cello solos in Bright Music with an artistry that excited Ettelson and McMillan to hope the three could form a trio. In fact, Lisle had

always “loved the tapestry of sound created by the combination of instruments in a piano trio and had longed for the miracle of finding compatible players. “ The White Oak Trio was formed. For Ettelson, her musical colleagues “inspire her to continuously extend her artistic reach. The excitement of creating a piece of music together has been the ultimate musical experience of her life.” Lisle “treasures the friendship, exchange of ideas, and the sharing of the music.” McMillan feels that “the piano trio format allows him the maximum opportunity to blend the skills of a collaborator and soloist. It utilizes all of his experience as he continues to expand as a musician.”

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