

# In Collaboration Between Blair And Serafin String Quartets, Two Friends And Violinists Reunite

By KARA MCLELAND · APR 5, 2017 Nashville Public Radio



*The Serafin and Blair String Quartet*

Playing in a string quartet isn't easy. "You hear so many stories of how it goes wrong," says Kate Ransom, violinist for the Serafin Quartet and one of the group's founding members. "It's such a delicate balance, you have to work so intimately together" she continues, citing a laundry list of moving parts that keep Serafin running smoothly.

You've got to make decisions about business, promotion and touring. Then you've got to *go* on the tour, which takes a special kind of friendship—and often a good sense of humor—to make it successful. Perhaps most importantly, you've got to respect each other's musicianship.

For Ransom, Nashville was an ideal place to begin crafting that musicianship.

"I had access to wonderful teachers, and the arts and culture environment was great," the former Nashvillian points out, "and it's probably even more robust now than it was then."

Ransom is just one of many precocious Nashville artists to forge a career in the classical world: "So many in my generation have gone on to become professional musicians," she says. In fact, she is just one in her own *family*: Her brother, Will Ransom, is a professional classical pianist and educator.

Cornelia Heard, violinist of Vanderbilt's Blair String Quartet, is another home-grown artist from Ransom's generation. The two studied together at the Blair Academy (precursor of Vanderbilt's Blair School of Music), and both held successive positions as concertmaster of the Nashville Youth Symphony.

“I really looked up to her and aspired to be a musician like her,” Ransom says, explaining that while Heard was a few years her senior, the two were friends. She remembers squeezing in a few games of ping-pong when they weren’t playing violin.

It’s a friendship that Ransom and Heard have maintained, even as they’ve pursued their individual careers. After her first job at 16 as the youngest member of the Nashville Symphony, Ransom went on to found the Alexander String Quartet before settling in Delaware with Serafin. Heard studied at Julliard, and both have made recordings and toured extensively.

When the opportunity arises, they work together by collaborating on workshops or trading visiting lectures. Ransom has sent graduating seniors to study with Heard at Blair: “I respect her as a violin pedagogue—and I don’t use that word lightly,” she says. “She has spent years perfecting her craft and produces great students.”

Even with all their collaborations, Ransom says it’s probably been 20 years since she and Heard have had the opportunity to properly play together. [This Friday, April 7](#), with the Blair and Serafin Quartets, they’ll have the opportunity to revisit the last piece they performed together decades ago: Mendelssohn’s famed Octet for Strings. The piece will end a program from Serafin, which also features quartets from Mendelssohn and Haydn.

For Ransom, the performance in Nashville feels like a homecoming; a full circle moment. She looks forward to connecting with Heard and colleagues at Blair, specifically, because it’s where she says she first began to forge her career path.