

July 03, 2003

World-class quartet coming to hamlet

Why is a chamber music group The New Yorker calls "the brainiest of the hot young American string quartets" playing a church near a creek in the western Sullivan County hamlet of Hortonville?

Let's ask the woman who presents Saturday's Brentano String Quartet concert.

"We've always had musicians of this caliber," says Judith Pearce of Lake Huntington, stating the obvious for those in the classical music know.

Fact is, Pearce is a major figure in the chamber music world. The musicians she presents in her annual Weekend of Chamber Music series are her friends.

She teaches flute at Princeton University, where she chairs the concert committee. The Brentano String Quartet was Princeton's first quartet-in-residence.

Pearce also draws on her classical music friends from England, where she grew up in the Sussex countryside. That's where she was the 19-year-old flutist for the Nash Ensemble. And that's why Pearce and the Brentano Quartet will be performing a piece by one of her English colleagues, composer Nicholas Maw, along with selections from Bach's "The Art of the Fugue."

So when Pearce came to America in 1986, it made sense she would invite her friends to perform near her country home in Lake Huntington.

The first spot was an unlikely room – the old Lake Huntington meat market.

"Informal, and the American word would be funky," she says with typical understatement in her British accent.

Since then, Pearce has presented top chamber musicians in the Tusten Theatre in Narrowsburg, the Nutshell Inn in Lake Huntington and now in that old white church in Hortonville.

So really, for Judith Pearce, the answer to why one of the world's top string quartets is playing Hortonville is simple.

"It's all based on colleagues and friends," she says. "All of us share a love of chamber music."

It's summer and the Sullivan arts scene is hot:

- The Weekend of Chamber Music presents two concerts.

At 4 p.m. tomorrow, Pearce and the winds quintet perform an American Celebration Fourth of July concert at the Liberty Museum and Arts Center, 46 Main St., Liberty. Admission is \$10, including a chicken barbecue. Children get in free.

At 8 p.m. Saturday, The Brentano String Quartet and Pearce perform at the Hortonville Presbyterian Church, Route 131, Hortonville. Admission is \$20, under 18 free. 932-8527.

- The Catskill Art Society show, Women Artists of the Catskills, which features some of the top female artists of the region, opens 2 p.m. Sunday at the Sullivan County Museum, 265 Main St., Hurleyville. 436-4227.

- For some terrific doo-wop, check out the Shallows, 6 p.m. Sunday on the patio of the Village Hall in Woodridge. It's free. 434-7447 or 434-7023.

May 17, 2003

Today's best bets

Mr. Rovitz's Opus

A chamber music concert at 7:30 p.m. honors the retirement of Monticello Central School's music director, Steven Rovitz, after 33 years. Weekend of Chamber Music flutist Judith Pearce, pianist Marija Stroke, oboist Matt Sullivan and bassist Kurt Muroki are joined by students they've coached in the high school's chamber music program. The concert is in the band room at Monticello High School, Wood Avenue. Tickets are \$10, free for age 17 and younger. Call 932-8414.