

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT // MUSIC & NIGHTLIFE

## Cellist's piece on gut strings a first at Valley of the Moon Music Festival

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Eric Zivian and Tanya Tomkins co-founded the Valley of the Moon Music Festival, which focuses on chamber music.

Photo: Margo Moritz

Cellist **Tanya Tomkins** has played **Schoenberg's** Romantic 1899 "Verklärte Nacht (Transfigured Night)" many time on modern steel strings, but she's never played it using sheep-gut strings of the sort used by the musicians who premiered that string sextet or the atonally-leaning String Quartet No. 2 that the Viennese master composed in 1908.

Tomkins will finally get to play both Schoenberg pieces on gut-core strings this summer at the fourth annual Valley of the Moon Music Festival, which she co-founded and directs with fortepiano specialist **Eric Zivian** (her significant other offstage, too). The festival runs July 14-29 at Sonoma's Hanna Center Auditorium, featuring chamber music by **Mozart**, **Schubert** and others.

As far as they know, no one in the Bay Area — fertile ground for period-instrument ensembles and research — has performed Schoenberg on gut strings, which were standard for centuries until the demands of modern repertoire and bigger halls led to the switch to brighter steel strings in the mid-20th century.

With the more subtle and demanding gut strings, "you can get a lot of different timbres, more variety and color," Tomkins says by phone from the piano-filled Berkeley home she shares with Zivian.

Steel strings, she explains, "make it easier to play and get a kind of glossy, more predictable sound. They're less fussy and less dangerous to play on, which is why everyone uses them!" With gut strings, "there's so much you can do with the bow. The gut requires you to be very conscious at all times of how much pressure, how much bow you're using, which will change the sound a lot."

Tomkins, whose other gigs include playing with the Bay Area's sterling Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, learned much about that bowing from violist **Eugene Lehner**, a longtime member of the Viennese Kolisch Quartet that premiered many works by Schoenberg and other modernists. Lehner also coached violinist **Anna Presler**, another Valley of the Moon Festival musician.

"At our festival, we don't play Baroque music. We start around **Haydn**, and now we're going as late as Schoenberg," says Tomkins, who finds playing and hearing these historically informed performances revelatory and thrilling.

"We're not saying in a stuffy or academic way, 'This is how it was done.' It's a way to open up a new sound world, and possibly see what the composer had in mind."

Zivian, who performs with Valley of the Moon musicians June 9 at the Berkeley Festival & Exhibition, plans to play many of the Sonoma performances on his 1841 Viennese fortepiano. He's hot to hear his colleagues play Schoenberg's 1908 quartet.

“It’s on the cusp of modernism, when he started experimenting with atonality,” Zivian says.

“Schoenberg’s heroes were **Brahms** and **Wagner**, and his style of expressionism grows straight out of Romanticism. He heard that music with those expressive gut strings. That’s all that was there when he wrote his string quartet. I think it will be interesting for the audience and great for our players to experience the music in that context.”

For more information, go to [www.valleyofthemoonmusicfestival.org](http://www.valleyofthemoonmusicfestival.org)

## Dancing

in the streets

The Berkeley Arts Museum and Pacific Film Archive will show dance-filled movies on its big outdoor screen the second Sunday of the month from June 10 to Oct. 14 for its series “Sunday Summer Cinema: Dancing in the Streets.”

Part of Addison Street will close to traffic for the screenings, which begin with the classic 1952 **Gene Kelly** and **Stanley Donen** musical “Singin’ in the Rain,” followed by “The Red Shoes”; **Amanda Lipitz**’s 2017 documentary “Step”; evergreen “West Side Story”; and **Jacques Demy**’s 1967 mod-ish musical “The Young Girls of Rochefort,” featuring Kelly, **Catherine Deneuve** and her sister, **Françoise Dorléac** (killed in a car crash at age 25 that year), complete with lovely **Michel Legrand** songs like “You Must Believe in Spring.”

For more information, go to [www.bampfa.org](http://www.bampfa.org)

## Jazz in Berkeley

The Back Room in Berkeley has booked two noted Bay Area artists for June residencies: blues-jazz singer **Faye Carol** , performing every Sunday in June with guests like vocalist **Nicolas Bearde**, and saxophonist **Noel Jewkes** and his group, with singer **Kay Kostopoulos**, on Friday nights (except Friday, June 1).

For more information, go to [www.backroommusic.com](http://www.backroommusic.com)

## Brewer joins Conservatory

The San Francisco Conservatory of Music continues to expand its faculty with the addition of bassist and SFJazz Collective member **Matt Brewer** to its Roots, Jazz and American Music program.

For more information, go to [www.sfcm.edu](http://www.sfcm.edu)

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