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Harvest Serenade

MusiKaravan strikes a chord on local farms

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Fugues on the farm

A harvest serenade courtesy of MusiKaravan

by Gwendolyn Alley

What would you do as a violinist if a pandemic canceled your concerts? Buy a 1971 VW bus and take your show on the road, of course!

At least that's what Los Angeles-based violinists Etienne Gara and YuEun Gemma Kim decided to do.

mance from Seoul National University and has become something of a YouTube superstar, with 6.6 million views for her "Chopin: Nocturne in C Sharp Minor for Violin and Piano," which is part of her project to arrange Chopin for violin.

Gara was slated to spend the summer at the Hollywood Bowl with the LA Philharmonic,

Kim at various festivals. With COVID-19 clearing their schedules, the duo found some creative ways to keep the music playing. They offered courtyard concerts for socially distanced audiences and did a Delirium Musicum performance of "Ciao Bella" from *The Money Heist*, which was recorded on iPhones on three continents.

This fall, they hatched a new plan: Travel from place to place to play their violins in vineyards and perform COVID-compliant fugues on farms, camping onsite in their vintage Volkswagen van. They would take photos and videos and share their journey on social media.

They called this endeavor the MusiKaravan, a side project for Delirium Musicum, of which Gara is artistic director and Kim is a founding member. Delirium Musicum seeks to build a special bond with its audience, to bring joy and to inspire people through music. With MusiKaravan, they could continue to achieve this goal.

Once they painted their vintage van cherry red and got it camera ready and road worthy, Gara and Kim had their first gig in Oceanside. That night, they parked in the Meiners Oaks driveway of mutual friends, where they asked about vineyards where they could perform for pickers. That's how I ended up loading them and their gear plus my cattle dog into my Honda CRV early one smoky

September morning, taking the violinists to played music in the malbec for two crews of harvesters.

"We delighted in their vision to hit the road and play music al fresco for the joy of laborers in the orchards, fields and vineyards. It sent us back to the time when our lives could be the freedom to have a plan to have no plan," said Clos des Amis co-owner and co-winemaker Gretel Mays Compton. "We like to invite our *amis* to help pick the grapes at harvest and do winery tasks such as bottle wine. There are often new faces that show up unexpectedly and when Etienne and YuEun Gemma drove



Etienne Gara and YuEun Gemma Kim delighting pickers in the malbec vineyards of Clos des Amis. (Photos courtesy of MusiKaravan)

Paris-raised Gara, a graduate of the New England Conservatory, has studied with the likes of Itzhak Perlman and Midori Gotō. He played on Leonard Cohen's last album and created "Sketches of Miles," inspired by the work of Miles Davis.

Since 2019, he has served as artist in residence at University of Southern California's Brain and Creativity Institute, where he met YuEun Gemma Kim, a Starling Fellow on full scholarship at the USC Thornton School of Music (where she recently graduated with an Artist Diploma). Raised in Seoul, Kim earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in violin perfor-



Drone footage captures the duo performing at Ojai Olive Oil for owner Alice Asquith (left) and others. (Photo courtesy of MusiKaravan)

up in their perfectly restored VW Vanagon, it caught Bruce's attention instantly."

The experience brought co-owner Bruce Freeman back to the time when he'd restored his own VW van.

"Many cultures have harvest songs, songs they can sing together in the vineyards to make the centuries-old ritual of picking grapes a more enjoyable shared task," reflected Freeman.

"Having MusiKaravan play their beautiful violins in the vineyard for our 2020 harvest transcended time and place to help lighten the load of every bucket of grapes we picked," agreed Compton. "They made our malbec harvest a memorable experience and the wine we are crafting from those grapes promises perfection!"

Another *amie* in the vineyard was Maria Christopher, a self-described "super-volunteer" who serves on the Heritage Valley Tourism Bureau Board of Directors and as marketing and media liaison for the Rancho Camulos Museum.

"When the violin duo joined us in the vineyard, it was so spiritually uplifting," said Christopher.

Once Christopher learned more about MusiKaravan, she invited them to the Rancho Camulos National Historical Landmark. While the Rancho Camulos Museum is currently open by reservation only for COVID-compliant outdoor tours, Christopher arranged for graduate students from the American Film Institute Conservatory to join MusiKaravan for a shoot for a student film project.

"Another tranquil experience evolved as the magic of the violin strings wafted through the air as the sun set in the Santa Clara River Valley at Rancho Camulos," described Christopher.

Ojai Olive Oil also hosted the duo for several evenings, providing a scenic place to stay while they completed drone footage at Clos des Amis, shot the project at Camulos, and performed in their olive orchard.

"What struck us most was the friendliness and sense of community of everyone," said Gara. "Everyone knew someone who knew someone, and we could just follow the trail of word of mouth and meet amazing people, who

opened the doors of their home."

By "home," Gara means not where people live and sleep, but the places that are dear.

"The beautiful nature of Ventura County made great harmony with our music," said Kim. "The birds, the leaves rustling in the wind and dogs made a natural acoustic background for the violins."



TOP: Gara and Kim entertain at Ojai Olive Oil. (Photo courtesy of MusiKaravan) ABOVE: Gara and Kim painted their VW Vanagon a bright cherry red before taking it on a tour of vineyards, orchards and farms. (Photo courtesy of Gwendolyn Alley/Wine Predator)

From Ventura County, MusiKaravan heads north, bringing to fruition the Delirium Musicum purpose to "envision a world that is inspired by the ecstatic interpretation of music!" ♦

For videos and more information about Etienne Gara, YuEun Kim and MusiKaravan, visit deliriummusicum.com/projects-without-borders/musikaravan/, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/MusiKaravan and @musikaravan on Instagram.

Author Gwendolyn Alley writes about food, wine and travel at winepredator.com.