

Iris Piano Trio

Press Kit



Videos

- [Highlights from June 2017 Resident Showcase](#)
- [CESLC 2017 Ring House Profile](#)
- [Fantazye by Kevin McKee](#) (commissioned and performed by the Iris Piano Trio)

About us

Violinist Sara Matayoshi, cellist Lauren Latessa and pianist Jessica McKee formed the Iris Piano Trio in September of 2016 with the dual mission of performing chamber music at the highest level and creating meaningful musical experiences for seniors.

The group serves as the ensemble in residence for The Music Project in Rockville, MD. In this role, the trio collaborates with elders from three retirement homes, working in independent living, assisted living and memory care contexts. Each year they curate an annual rotation of concerts, open rehearsals, participatory group programs, and one-on-one sessions designed specifically for these communities. The Music Project is a first-of-its-kind experiment at the intersection of creative aging and creative placemaking.

The 2018 year includes performances and presentations at the Peabody Conservatory, the Arts Club of Washington and the Music at St. Alban's concert series in Davidson North Carolina. Additionally, in March, the trio will host and present *Ladies First*, a week long celebration of women in the arts.

In Greek Mythology the goddess Iris was thought to use the rainbow as a bridge between heaven and earth, while the petals of the Iris flower are said to symbolize faith, valor and wisdom. These metaphors captures the holistic spirit of the Iris trio's work. Both in concert and through their commitment to their elderly neighbors, they are dedicated to using music to provide peace, comfort and spiritual fulfillment for the most vulnerable members of their community.

Quotes from participating seniors and their families

This project saved my life. Suddenly I realized the arch of my life could go up again. I found something I loved and could give back to.

My head is so full of the music. Music can solve things that nothing else can.

You know, most of us just sit around feeling like we are no longer needed. But you've helped me to see that there are beautiful things to do in the world.

I just wanted to let you know your music really touched my heart. I know nothing about music, but the way you engaged the audience and the sound of that Bach, it really touched my heart!

We are so lucky to have you here. You mean so much to so many people.

Dear Lauren - We so appreciate all the music you bring to us - we are grateful for everything you do to bring light and joy into our lives.

You made me so happy when you played for me the other day. Your song "Always" was so special for me. Music is a universal language and can do many great things. I will never forget you.

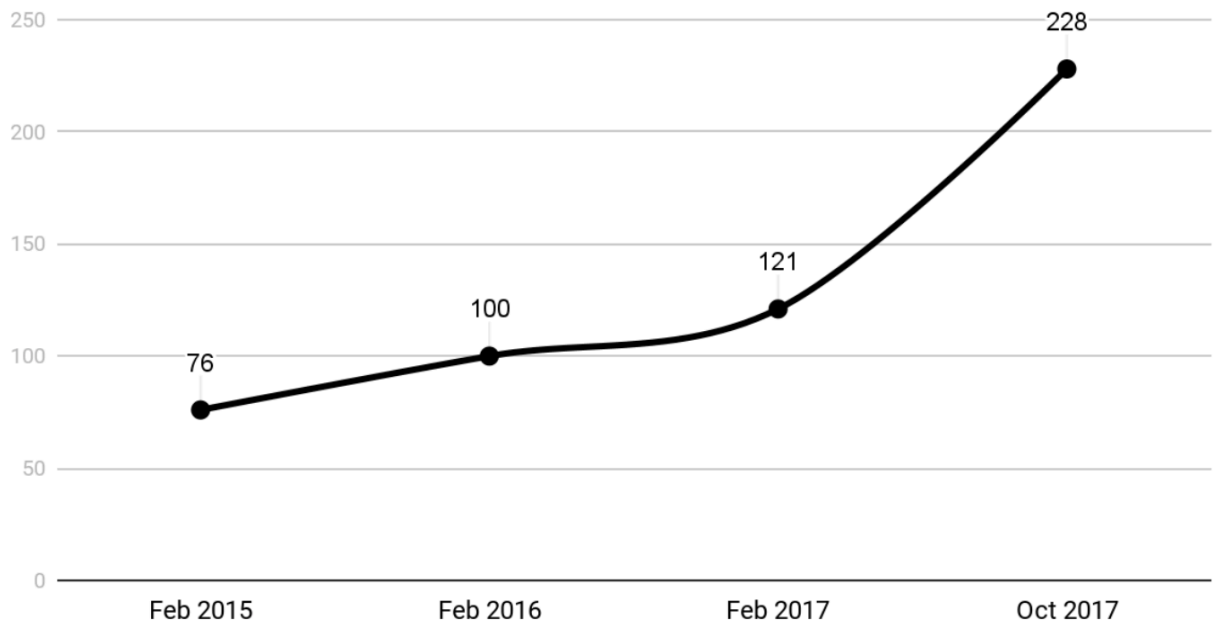
The time you spent with Leonard was undoubtedly the best part of his stay for 11 months. Your patience and dedication to everyone here is much appreciated.

Dear Lauren, Sara and Jessica: I wanted to let you know how much your work here has allowed the residents self-esteem to grow. High-five for great teamwork and I hope to see another event in the spring!

Dear Lauren: Thank you for all you did to bring so much joy and meaning to mother during her years here. You and the programs you organize add wonderful depth and texture to people's lives at a time when those qualities are scarce. And you do it with such vitality, grace and charm!

Programming Results

The Iris Piano Trio runs 6 hours/week of open rehearsals and 11 hours/week of group programming across three levels of care: independent living, assisted living and memory care communities. Since the start of the program in February 2017 we have seen **significant increases in group program attendance**, as shown in the figure below.



Additionally, we work with 36 residents across the three buildings. Individual projects include:

- Violin/piano/cello lessons
- Intergenerational trio rehearsals and concerts (members aging from 18 to 96)
- Collaborative concert planning
- Collaborative design of a month-long presentation on Israeli Music
- Presentations on musicians from the Swing Era, including Benny Goodman, Ella Fitzgerald, Artie Shaw and others

Iris Piano Trio Residency at University of Maryland

An Alternative Path: Chamber Music in Unexpected Places

A residency on entrepreneurship and creative, meaningful engagement with different kinds of audiences.

Tuesday, October 17, 2017

Join the Iris Piano Trio (violinist Sara Matayoshi, cellist Lauren Latessa, and pianist Jessica McKee) at 11am in Room 2201 (Choral Room) for a lecture/discussion on the intersections of chamber music and community engagement. The trio will present their visionary work and its potential impact on elderly citizens across the country. Additionally, they will discuss the many ways that musicians can incorporate this type of work into their professional lives, building unique and artistically rewarding paths. The School of Music is just beginning a partnership with Collington, a Continuing Care Retirement Community, and the work of the Iris Piano Trio in this area aligns nicely with our own priorities regarding community engagement.

Thursday, October 19, 2017

The Iris Trio performs a short program with narrative at 11am in the Leah Smith Hall for chamber music students and all other interested persons.

Student Reactions

This changed my whole perspective - now I know what I want to do with my life!

I was so inspired by this work and it leaves me with a sense of what might be possible for musicians today.

Stories from the musicians

Lauren

A few days ago I played for Lily just a few hours before she passed. She had followed our project from the beginning. We had laughed together and created music together. Up until she was placed on hospice a few months ago, she was a loyal listener, and never missed a rehearsal or concert.

I have always believed that my responsibility as a musician is to tap into the struggles and joys of the human condition. In no moment do you understand this more clearly than walking into a room, knowing that your music will be the last sounds heard by a dear friend.

This month, as we explore the relationship between music and spirituality, I've been reminded of the awesome power music has to give all stages of life more depth, more beauty, more meaning. Used correctly, in Lily's room, it made all the difference: one last moment of connection, one last peaceful breath, one last smile.

Sara

On this particular day, when I walked into the memory care community, Mary complained that her hands were hurting. They were severely chapped and some ointment had just been put on the open wounds. She thought there should be music to take away the pain so we composed an eight-bar song about her aching hands, which brought some humor to the situation. Somewhere along the way she forgot about how much they actually hurt. We then segued into singing Yiddish folk songs which is usually how we spend time together. She will sing in Yiddish, translate, and then explain to me how the songs reflect Jewish culture and values.

Marjorie's story

Presented at a luncheon in June 2017

How wonderful you all are to recognize and endorse the profound impact music has had on our community. When Robert Browning wrote, "Grow old with me/the best is yet to be", I don't think he'd even hit 70. Growing old is hard, and it's especially daunting in this age of Adoring Youth in all its glory. Each one of us has our singular story, but I'll bet you practically anything that given the chance, we'd rather be at least 20 years younger, running around busy as bees. It's exciting to be able constantly to look forward, to the next best job, or invention, or play, or whatever makes life interesting for you. A whole lot less wonderful when you can't hit the tennis ball because your knee buckled, or retirement turns out to be more boring than exhilarating. I could go on and on, but you all know the words to this particular song, and here's where music enters.

My arrival here was abrupt, unexpected and traumatic. The past 5 years had been nothing but loss, illness and death. The moment is burned into my mind when the doctor put both hands on my shoulders and said, "Marjorie, the man you married is gone." I'm positive all of you have experienced some moment when the arc of your life stops short. Everything familiar disappears; you're suddenly facing a horrifying new reality. Now, I know everyone thinks their marriage is special, but ours truly was. Possibly because my husband was both a playwright and an Advertising Creative Director, our friends tended to be a lot more unconventional than our Westchester neighbors. Our days were filled with laughter, wild conversations, insanity and adventure! Then came the deadly diagnosis. And a few years later, Don ultimately slipped away.

forever.

Now, even with an army of help, my future looked anything but promising. When my niece found me an apartment five floors down from hers in Chevy Chase my life seemed to calm down. I knew nothing about Maryland, and knew no one but Debby and her husband. Although life was dramatically different, the arc of day to day living was again going up, and there was lots to look forward to. I moved to Chevy Chase in August. Suddenly, without any warning at all, the cancer Deb had conquered 17 years before reappeared. Two months later she died. Chaos. My house in Westchester had been sold, my children were hundreds of miles away. Everyone around me agreed I couldn't live alone, and social workers kept showing me places they assured me I would love. I hated them. I moved, still depressed, and still convinced that the arc of my life was rapidly going downhill. I looked forward to nothing.

About a week later, I was walking down the halls towards my apartment when I heard one of the most beautiful sounds in the world: someone was practicing the cello! I stood outside the door, hardly able to breath. A few minutes later, out came a young woman, with warm brown eyes, carrying her cello on her back. And that's how I met Lauren, "Oh, you're new" she said "Do you like music?" I not only liked it, I explained, I was a pianist, a long, long time ago. "Then you can help us with our chamber music," she said enthusiastically. But I told her that not only had I never played chamber music, but I'd never even seen a score. "You can coach us," she said. "No, I can't," I protested. I've coached actors, and worked in theater, but I knew nothing about what you're telling me I can do. You'll figure it out she answered, with complete confidence. With that, she handed me the score of a Brahms trio, and said we'd meet the following week. So I said to myself, ok....I'm 87, I know zip about what this young woman is asking me to do, but why don't I just give it a shot? I began listening to recordings and attending Lauren, Sara and Jessica's rehearsals. And that, folks, is how the Iris Trio gave me back my life. I look up performances of the trio on YouTube, took the score, and tried to follow the notes of three instruments instead of my familiar piano scores.

At first I was lost ... it isn't easy to learn something new. But it took all of my attention, concentration and after two hours I actually could follow it. I cannot describe how this changed my life, not only because rehearsals are my favorite things, but I discovered that the sun hadn't set. The arc of my life began to go up again. And this is what the Iris Trio does; they encourage people to try new things and be engaged in relevant discussions. *This is, in no uncertain terms, a miracle.*

Coleridge said it best, when he wrote:

"Life is but a thought, so think I will that youth and I are house-mates."