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at Harvard

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Watch a video trailer for the Carr-Petrova Duo's *Novel Voices* album at www.chamber-music.org/extras

The Sound of Home

Carr-Petrova Duo

Molly Carr and Anna Petrova believe in the power of music to do great things. Acting on that shared belief, the viola-piano duo recently carried out an extraordinary project: between August 2018 and October 2019, the two musicians traveled to refugee camps and facilities in Denmark, the U.S., the West Bank, and Petrova's native Bulgaria, performing, teaching, listening, and creating music together. The displaced children and adults with whom they worked came from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Congo, Colombia, and other areas affected by violence and ongoing conflict.

This ambitious project, dubbed "Novel Voices," isn't Carr's first foray into performing for audiences deprived of cultural opportunity. Seven years ago, the violist founded a nonprofit called Project: Music Heals Us which, she says, "exists to bring music into facilities and communities where people would not be able to access the arts themselves," including prisons, homeless shelters, hospices, and hospitals.

Two years ago, when the duo began giving concerts, right away, says Petrova, they asked: "How can we combine our

professional desired goals with something that is larger than ourselves? Obviously, Molly having this background with her organization, that comes very naturally to her."

Novel Voices was conceived in what the pair describe as "two strange, inspired, manic days." The plan: Carr and Petrova would travel with a composer friend, Fernando Arroyo Lascuain, performing and giving workshops on basic elements of music and musical storytelling. Local partner organizations would prepare the refugees to share elements of their own music, stories, and poetry. With Arroyo's aid, performers and refugees would end by creating music together. Meanwhile, a social media campaign would provide information for others wishing to aid refugees. The journey would be chronicled on the Duo's website and in a documentary. "In those two days of dreaming," says Carr, "it all seemed very clear cut: Step 1, Step 2, Step 3."

Reality proved much more complicated. "As we got into it, we realized, 'Wow, this Step 1 has ten thousand parts. . . and this Step 2, that has twenty thousand!'" The duo

found funding in the form of a Music Academy of the West Alumni Enterprise Award. They appeared at the U.N., performing, speaking, and meeting representatives of governments and NGOs who would aid them in navigating myriad bureaucratic challenges. Partners emerged in Los Angeles, New Jersey, Bulgaria, and Bethlehem.

"After doing this project, I feel like I can do anything," says Petrova. "It's really been an intense journey for just two musicians with conservatory degrees."

In October, the duo gave a Carnegie Hall recital featuring a new composition by Arroyo, also called "Novel Voices," which incorporates elements from the duo's visits: Congolese rhythms, Bulgarian *rachenitsa*, music composed together in the camps. It's "an emotional journey every time we play it," says Carr. Petrova explains that, meeting the refugees, they "suddenly made friends within an hour, because of the music."

"Relationships don't end just like that," reflects Carr. "We'll definitely still be continuing to go back whenever we can." ■ www.carrpetrovaduo.com

By Sasha Margolis