



Worldly Wise

The group is made up of a language scholar, a geology/geophysics major, a doctoral candidate in educational studies and a tennis ace. Oh...and they all play string instruments. But the range of interests shown by the **Vinca Quartet's** members points to an understanding of music as part of the world at large—an awareness they bring to all their activities. The quartet has the packed touring schedule of a professional ensemble. But much of its activity goes beyond conventional concertizing toward an effort to place music in a greater context.



LAURA SEAY,
AARON REQUIRO,
JESSICA TONG, AND
AN-LIN BARDIN

Look at the quartet's work with Livermore, California's Hertz Foundation—an organization that awards fellowships to top doctoral candidates in science. The foundation holds a twice-yearly retreat for its scientists; this past August, the Vincas were invited to join them to explore parallels between science and music. "Many of them had no idea of what we did for a living," says Jessica Tong, the group's first violinist. But it soon became

clear. The scientists watched the musicians rehearse in order to analyze the myriad decisions and the complex interplay that go into putting together a musical interpretation. One scientist, working on a device to help blind people maneuver without the aid of a seeing-eye dog, used the quartet in an experiment on sound perception, having the musicians (save cellist An-Lin Bardin) move around a room as they played.

But the most conspicuous demonstration of the quartet's outward-looking focus is its "Gorgeous Sounds Residency": a two-week program, held three times a year, in the towns of Hood River, Oregon, and White Salmon, Washington, along the Columbia River. The region ("the windsurfing capital of the world") hosts a wildly diverse population, from technology execs to migrant farm workers, many of whom have never had the chance to hear live chamber music. "When we first approached them, they were excited about the prospect of a quartet—but they thought we meant a *barbershop* quartet!" says Tong.

During each Gorgeous Sounds Residency, the Vincas perform free community chamber concerts, go into area schools for classes and demonstrations, and run workshops for local music teachers. "It's incredible how open people are to chamber music when you're present," says Tong.

"We don't want them to have this experience just two weeks a time," Tong explains. "We're working with local artists and musicians, acting as a catalyst for what we hope will be a bigger and broader project from the community. For us personally, given our backgrounds and our training in other areas, it goes beyond music: it shows how music can complement your entire education." www.vincaquartet.com