

# Viola Magic



we're more laid back but still driven. Viola players are kind of stuck in the middle but that can be a good thing. If we weren't there, then people would notice that something was missing."

These days Cathy Miller works the music magic with another talented musician, Jim Gill. They have a full schedule of gigs and

ment each other's perfectly. "Jim and I met in June of 2010 at The Winchester in Lakewood which is a fantastic venue," said Cathy. "I was with the progressive rock band, UZIZI. The band is great with great players but it really wasn't the direction I wanted to focus on at the time. I wanted to work on things that were a bit more within my comfort zone. Anyway, our band had at least 17 members and we took awhile for sound check. Once we were done, it didn't leave much time for Jim to do his sound check. I felt bad about that."

Watching Jim do his sound check seemed to be a turning point for Cathy and her career. "When he started singing and using the loop device, I was completely captured by what he was doing and listened to his entire set," recalls Cathy. "I was able to talk with him after the show. He then asked me if I would like to play with him at his gig the following weekend. That is how it all started. It has been such a blast. We've been playing together since August and it keeps getting better."

Their shows are a variety of music styles, genres and sounds. "We play a lot of different stuff," said Cathy. "My favorites are playing the originals that Jim has written. We do a wide variety of covers that range from Jim Croce to

Neil Young. We also do a medley of various artists. Someone once asked me what kind of music we played. I'm not sure what name you would give it, maybe acoustic folk rock. It's so different because we play music from Hendrix to Springsteen plus original material. Sometimes we experiment with the looping device, which is a neat way to make two people sound like a whole lot more. Jim will still do solos and I will do solos. It all works beautifully."

Playing viola also has its therapeutic outlet for Cathy. "It's the best feeling. It's a way to express yourself, to sometimes purge your emotions. It's a great release. It doesn't matter the size of the venue because there is always a surge of adrenaline. You never know what is going to happen. The best part of playing with Jim is that we are always listening to one another no matter how loud the place may be."

Having a supportive family around you is another crucial element when devoting time to the career you love. "Both Jim and I are very fortunate to have spouses who support what we do. It would be so much more difficult if there weren't that support because you have to spend a lot of time away from home. It all takes time, the rehearsals, practicing, travel, the gigs - but it's my work. A supportive family makes it even more worthwhile."

When asked what should people look for or expect when they come to see she and Jim play, Cathy said, "I would tell people to listen to the lyrics. That would be my biggest recommendation. I would hope the music and the lyrics would invoke listeners. Enjoy the overall sound of what we are trying to create because it's worth it."

For more information about Cathy Miller, Jim Gill, their show schedule and new material they are working on, please check the following web sites:

[www.cathymillermusic.com](http://www.cathymillermusic.com)  
[www.jimgillmusic.com](http://www.jimgillmusic.com)

at her high school and spent four years with The Cleveland Youth Orchestra. She attended college at Vander-

bilt University in Nashville. "I had auditioned for several schools to cast the net wide for more opportunities," said Cathy. "During that time I was studying with a gentleman from the Cleveland Orchestra and when he found out my hands were hurting he told me it was because I wasn't practicing enough. So when I went to audition at Vanderbilt, they asked me if my hands hurt. They told me it was because of the way I was holding and playing the viola. By the age of twenty, I already had carpal tunnel surgery on both hands so I am very lucky to be able to pick up the viola again and play. I guess I am an over achiever. The fact that I can still play for as long as I want makes it all worthwhile."

There is a certain separation of sorts between viola and violin players. "The people that play viola are a certain kind of person," explains Cathy. "It seems those who play violin are more involved with a pecking order. There is an entire culture in the classical world that can be brutal. It attacks your self-esteem so you have to be extra resilient. You can beat yourself up by telling yourself how horrible you are. There are others who are also happy to tell you the same thing. However, playing the viola,

By Helen Marketti

Watching Cathy Miller play the viola, one would think it was easy to do. She makes it seem so effortless but in truth, she has been playing the viola since the age of nine and her magic fingers have strummed hundreds of songs, harmonies and melodies. "I like to play the viola because it is supposed to emulate the sound of the human voice as close as possible. I have always been drawn to that," said Cathy.

"Before I started playing the viola I had always listened to country music on the radio because that is what my dad liked. I didn't even realize at age nine that there were other stations to listen to," said Cathy. "When I started playing viola, I started listening to classical music and would then play it. Once I got into my teens, around 14 or 15 is when I realized there were a lot more styles of music. I loved listening to Fairport Convention who were from the UK and not really known too well here in the US. I also listened to Jethro Tull, Janis Joplin, Asleep at the Wheel, Willie Nelson, Led Zeppelin and the sixties."

Cathy's talent and abilities brought experiences to sing with The Cleveland Orchestra Children's Choir when she was in junior high. She played the viola in the orchestra





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