

Classical sister act to perform

Maria Bessmeltseva and her sister Ekaterina will be performing at the Wood County library.

(J.D. Pooley/Sentinel-Tribune)

Wednesday, Oct. 31, 2007

The Bessmeltseva sisters' grandmothers would love to be able to attend Sunday's performance at the Wood County District Public Library. But they're back in Russia. They do get to hear violinist Maria and pianist Ekaterina play when they visit home. But those are informal affairs in the home, just for family. Maria said finding a place to perform publicly in St. Petersburg is difficult. That makes them appreciate all the more the opportunity offered by the library's atrium space. The sisters will perform Sunday at 3 p.m. in the atrium of the library. The program will include Cesar Franck's "Sonata in A Major for violin and piano," Bela Bartok's "Romanian Dances" and Edward Elgar's "Chanson de Nuit" and "Chanson de Matin." Both musicians began their musical training at 7. Their mother had played piano as did an older sister who quit lessons early on. Their musical paths, though, were different.

Maria Bessmeltseva, the older, was the more serious. "She always liked it," her sister said before a rehearsal in Bryan Recital Hall on the Bowling Green State University campus. She said her mother told her that her sister Maria had a dream when she was a child about playing in a concert hall and people applauding her. "I don't remember that dream," the 24-year-old violinist told her sister.

Their mother and their grandparents, though, do have a dream of seeing the sisters perform in "a big hall in Russia," Maria Bessmeltseva said. Though so far they've had to make do with hearing the sisters play at home. "My grandmothers, they'll start crying, saying it's so beautiful." The older sister from age 9 studied in a school devoted to music. "The main topic is music," she said. "Other stuff not so much." Seven years ago, Maria Bessmeltseva followed her violin teacher to the Oberlin College Conservatory where she studied for five years. Then she came to BGSU where she studied with Vasile Beluska and earned a master's degree in music performance. This fall she will be attending the University of Michigan to work on another master's degree. Ekaterina Bessmeltseva was less directed in her career choices. She wanted to be many things, her elder sister said. She considered being an actor, a teacher, a ballet dancer. Ekaterina Bessmeltseva went to a regular school, but continued to study piano. Only in high school, inspired by her sister, did she decide to pursue a career in music. Ekaterina followed her sister to the United States three years ago, studying first with Russian pianist Maxim Mogilevsky, and now with Dr. Laura Melton. A senior at BGSU, she is starting to look at masters programs. The sisters would often play together at home starting with simple duets with the music getting harder and harder. "Here we go playing the Franck," Ekaterina Bessmeltseva said, laughing. The composition by the 19th century French composer is the showpiece on the program, and the one that poses the greatest musical challenges. The piano part is particularly difficult, more difficult, the sisters agree, than the violin part. The piece is a favorite. "It's very romantic and passionate," the violinist said. And the melodies in the fourth movement remind her of Russian songs.

The Bartok piece, based on folk music, is full of Romanian passion, the violinist said. The Elgar songs are short. "They're just beautiful, like love songs," the elder sister said. She said that there's "a special connection" performing with her sister. For her part Ekaterina Bessmeltseva said she'd much rather play with her sister than with other violinists. They plan to continue their sister act. "This year," Maria Bessmeltseva said, "we're trying to play as many concerts as we can."

By DAVID DUPONT

Sentinel Arts & Entertainment Editor