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Borromeo String Quartet brings T.S. Eliot

# Borromeo String Quartet brings T.S. Eliot poem to Rockport Chamber Music Festival

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Composer Elena Ruehr's 'The Worlds Revolve,' based on a T.S. Eliot poem, will be premiered by the Borromeo String Quartet on June 9. COURTESY PHOTO

By Keith Powers / Correspondent

Posted Jun. 2, 2016 at 4:46 AM

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If you go...

**WHAT:** Borromeo String Quartet, with pianist Donald Berman, at Rockport Chamber Music Festival

**WHERE:** Shalin Liu Performance Center, 37 Main St., Rockport



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Composer Elena Ruehr's 'The Worlds Revolve,' based on a T.S. Eliot poem, will be premiered by the Borrromeo String Quartet on June 9. COURTESY PHOTO

Stephen Salters, saw its world premiere here in 2000, with Salters and the Shanghai Quartet (Salters and the Biava Quartet repeated the work in 2010). Borrromeo premiered her third string quartet in 2002.

This season, on Thursday evening, June 9, Borrromeo again tackles a premiere composed by Ruehr. "The Worlds Revolve" takes its inspiration from the fourth Prelude of T.S. Eliot, and Ruehr has transformed that inspiration into her first piano quintet, composing it for Borrromeo and pianist Donald Berman.

The piece is dedicated to Deveau. "I've loved this poem since I was an undergraduate," Ruehr says. "I've tried to set the text as a song, but never got it to work. But I kept coming back to it for more

than 30 years."

Ruehr, who now lives in Brookline and has been on the MIT faculty for many years, grew up in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

"What I love about the poem has something to do with my childhood," she says. "I grew up in an old mining town, with gigantic smokestacks that had been abandoned long ago on the shore of a lake. These smokestacks are overgrown by nature now, with vines all over them. And something about that image was captured in the poem."

"The Worlds Revolve" has four movements, and lasts about 20 minutes. As she has with many of her commissions, Ruehr composes with the specific performers in mind.

"In one sense it's intuitive," she says. "I have a picture of these people in my head, of them sitting here in my studio playing the music, as I write it. I feel like their presence is in my house.

"But in a specific sense, Don has a particular way of voicing chords, and of probing sounds. I kept those ideas in my head. And the same with Borrromeo: what they do well, and the sound that they make, is sort of in there."

Like all works that mix piano and strings, "The Worlds Revolve" attempts to meld the contrasting sound-worlds of those two kinds of instruments.

"I think of this quintet as characters, one for the piano, and one for the strings. It's a narrative, back and forth, between those two groups. There are relationships, themes in each movement, and they all have variety. Perhaps a way of looking at it is that it's for an ensemble, with a special highlight in the piano."

### Free lecture

Ruehr will speak about "The Worlds Revolve" in a lecture-demonstration with the performers on Thursday, June 9 at 2 p.m. This event is free to the public. Tickets (\$47-\$65) for that evening's performance are available at [www.rockportmusic.org](http://www.rockportmusic.org) or by calling 978-546-7391.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR's ARTery. Follow @PowersKeith; email to [keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com](mailto:keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com)

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