Spotlight: Mikael Darmanie, piano
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Mikael Darmanie has been involved with Apple Hill's Summer Chamber Music Workshop since 2009 as a student, a Fellowship Program musician, and on faculty. Now, he joins Apple Hill's resident musicians to perform Gabriel Fauré's Piano Quartet in C minor.

Mikael sat down for a chat with Director Lenny Matczynski the other day. Here's what he has to say:

"I was born in the District of Columbia, but I moved around a lot as a kid. I have family in Trinidad and Tobago, and when I was seven, I went to visit my grandmother there. I loved it so much that I called my mom and begged to stay. She said yes so I lived in Trinidad for several years.

"Later on my grandmother wanted me to take piano lessons for the focus, the discipline, and the culture. It was kind of a "keep me out of trouble" maneuver as a certain proclivity towards delinquency was prevalent in the youth from that region. I couldn't stand classical music, or the piano, but on one of my trips to America to visit my family, I heard a Chopin Nocturne (Op. 9 No. 2) and I thought that this was the most beautiful thing that I had ever heard. I fell in love with music at that moment. I eventually moved to North Carolina for high school and took serious music lessons.

"I was headed to grad school in Cincinnati when I first came to Apple Hill as a student. My homie Sassan from NC told me about it and I thought it sounded interesting. The second time I came to Apple Hill as part of the Fellowship Program, I was replacing the pianist in a trio with only a week and a half's notice. I do get called often for last-minute gigs these days. I just have to be nonchalant about it and totally open-minded. There's a crazy adrenaline rush that comes with performing on short notice and the only way to get comfortable with it is to do it often and to embrace the pressure.

"I'm working on my doctorate in piano now at SUNY Stony Brook. I wanted to do a doctorate because I love teaching. Some advantages of the university system employment path include job stability, benefits, a performance venue/outlet etc. I am also low-key a huge nerd, I read everything and I love relating music to literature, history and philosophy. I have about one year of work left on my doctorate.

"My group/band is called Warp Trio, and it is a contemporary music ensemble that consists of classically trained musicians that happen to improvise in genres like jazz, hip-hop, prog rock, gospel, bluegrass, etc., and it's the most interesting group that I've consistently worked with. We tour around the US, the Caribbean, and Europe pretty regularly. It's a standard piano trio--violin, cello, piano--and we add a drummer, but still call it a trio. We mostly write our own music from individual pieces to suites, to a Triple Concerto, etc. Some of our music is very notated and detailed/through-composed, some are lead sheet based and some are mostly improvised. In
addition to performing, we do a lot of residencies in mainly secondary and tertiary institutions teaching improvisation for classical musicians, giving masterclasses as well as collaborating with students. I've been studying Hindustani music on my own for years, and our recent album is based a lot on raga todi—a kind of dark and sinister and beautiful raga with a lot of weird intervals.

"When I was here on faculty this summer, I was at Brewbakers, the coffee shop in Keene next to the Colonial Theatre. I wandered over to see who was playing there and when I saw that Apple Hill would be, I thought that I should really try to come up to check out their concert. Turns out that concert is the same one that I'm playing on this week.

"Working with the Apple Hill musicians has been a pleasure—they are all formidable musicians and so easy to play with. There's a free exchange of ideas, all without much speaking. After we played through the first movement of the Fauré, I stopped and said, "you guys are risky, but in the best way possible!" I recently got a review after performing a Brahms Piano Quartet that called my playing "risky and alert." So maybe I'm the risky element here...

"When I've been at Apple Hill, I loved hearing about the Playing for Peace mission, it's quite beautiful and necessary. Another special thing I noticed about Apple Hill this past summer was how music bridged the age/social gaps between the students. There were so many microcosms of musical bonding and camaraderie occurring in the groups I coached, between teenagers, college students, and adults. It just shows how music can bring different people together. A session only lasts for ten days, but you see people weeping on the last day, tears of sweet sorrow. Time stands still for a bit here."

**Bio:**

Mikael Darmanie, piano, regularly performs throughout the Americas, Europe, and the Caribbean as a pianist, improviser, conductor, chamber musician with his group the Warp Trio, and as a DJ. He is currently a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellow in composition and is a Doctoral Candidate in Piano Performance at Stony Brook University in New York under the mentorship of Gil Kalish. He is an alumnus of Apple Hill's Fellowship Ensemble Program and now serves on Apple Hill's Summer Workshop faculty.