

**Inside the Artist -  
Willie Docto  
December 2014**



**What has been your journey? What brought you to the place where you thought you wanted to do this? How did you get started in this musical endeavor?**

I grew up in New York City and Oklahoma. My family settled in Oklahoma. I have played the violin since I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I was very involved in the youth orchestra in high school. When I went to college I studied violin, although I didn't major in music, I majored in Biology, but I kept playing and actually my playing helped me pay for college. So I had music scholarships and I played lots of private gigs and supplemented my income, but after graduation I got into orchestra management so I was producing concerts and managing orchestras in the DC area, The Georgetown Symphony Orchestra, and started the Virginia Chamber Orchestra, and worked part-time for the Fairfax Symphony, and the American Symphony Orchestra League which is now called The League of American Orchestras. I have this background in Orchestra Management and Arts Management and I continued to play after coming to Vermont. The playing actually helped me transition from moving from a big city to living in a small rural community in Vermont.



Playing and managing are my passions so I combined them by forming The Eleva Chamber Players. I get musicians coming from all over New England and New York and it's not the typical gig where they come and play and leave. It centers on food and community—it's a great experience.

**What most inspires your work right now? What are the criteria, the guide to choosing your creative projects?**

Because of Eleva's mission, I choose music that is mostly cheerful and positive. We want people to feel happy so I look for happy music, basically. Just recently we performed new music by three Vermont composers, which is a risk for us because audiences tend to shy away from contemporary music. But this music that we played was based on folk music, and because of that, there were a lot of recognizable tunes, and rhythms, and harmonies and nothing was experimental or avant-garde. It was very accessible music, and people enjoyed it.

I'm planning next year's concerts now, and so I ask musicians for suggestions and ideas, and when I find a piece of music that I know will work, I choose other music that will fit around it. The goal is always: *How will the audience react to this music?*



**What has been the biggest thing/event to influence your work? Do you have any artistic heroes, musical or otherwise?**

I don't have artistic heroes. I've gone to different performances that have inspired me, and it's that feeling that I have looked for and endeavor to create for other people. For instance, 20 years ago I went to London for the first time and went to a concert at St. Martin's in the Fields of a concert of the Brahms's Trio (cello, violin, piano). I sat in the back of the church, it was packed, but the music was so beautifully performed that I sat back there stunned during the entire time I was there. Even now I get emotional just thinking about it because the music just spoke to me. That's the kind of experience I want to give my audiences. I want them to be grabbed by the music and taken to a different place.

**Tell us about activities you enjoy outside of music.**

I enjoy running my bed and breakfast. I enjoy meeting lots of people from different places and different backgrounds. It's always exciting to meet someone new. Everyone's got a story and just to see their faces when they arrive and see their moods change because they're not in their typical grind and they let go

and relax, have fun and laugh. So I really enjoy that. We've been doing this for sixteen years now, and we'll continue to do it as long as we enjoy it. I love cooking! Which is great for the bed and breakfast. So even if we don't have guests, we love having friends over for dinner and try out new recipes.

**What's next for you?**

Vacation! I need a vacation! It's been a busy year, so the end of year has been very, very busy at the inn because of the tree-house and publicity. The beginning of the year musically was very busy, I found myself playing concerts and rehearsing every week. And Eleva just occurred, so my mind and body is shutting down and I'm going on holiday before the holidays hit. We're busy during the holidays here, so between now and the middle of December I'm in vacation mode. I need rejuvenation and inspiration.

The orchestra gets together once a year in early November (the three weeks before Thanksgiving). During the summer we host three house concerts to raise money for Eleva. Next year we're holding these concerts by invitation only because we have limited attendance and we don't even need to do publicity for it any more. People are just calling saying they want a reservation. I'm not even going to press releases anymore because we already at maximum capacity. The house concerts are fun because they start out with a reception before, then the concert, then finish off with a full course dinner. Really fun!

**What are you reading right now?**

Actually I'm reading a book by my nephew, Alex Portis. He is a lawyer in Baltimore and he took a sabbatical from his law firm to write this book on the New York Mafia. It's called, "*The Mob and the City: The Hidden History of How the Mafia Captured NY*", it's the genesis of the modern day mob. It's a very realistic version of it, not the Hollywood version. There are lots of segments of the city involved. It's not just the Mob, but it's the Police, the Unions, other ethnic groups the bars....Published by Prometheus Books.

