

La Musica chamber festival is creating musical fireworks

Jay Handelman
Sarasota Herald-Tribune
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Audiences should expect some fireworks and more surprises for the final three concerts of the La Musica International Chamber Music Festival, which returns to the Sarasota Opera House beginning April 8.

In her first year as artistic director, pianist Wu Han, one of the leaders of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, said she is trying to build trust with the audience, both longtime supporters and potential new listeners, through a new mix of repertoire and performers.

She expanded the programming to include single concerts in February and March “and judging by the standing ovations, I know the audience had a great time. My hope is as we build enough trust with all of them, they will keep coming. People do seem excited because the quality is so high,” Wu Han said.

For the three concerts starting April 8, Wu Han will perform with a core group of nine musicians, all of whom will be featured in the first two programs — “Grand Statements” at 7:30 p.m. April 8 and “Fireworks” at 7:30 p.m. April 11. Five of the musicians also will return for the season finale, “Grand Friendships” at 5 p.m. April 15.

“As artistic director, you’re like the chef trying to figure out this group of musicians. This group has the chemistry to create fireworks on stage because the eight string players are eight superstars in the chamber music world.”

The group features violinists Chad Hoopes, Kristin Lee, Paul Huang and James Thompson, violists Matthew Lipman and Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt and cellists David Finckel (Wu Han’s husband) and Keith Robinson.

Wu Han said she designs the program and then finds the musicians who can best perform and lead the works, which include Romanian composer George Enescu’s challenging Octet in C major for Strings, op.7, which Lee has led before.

“The Enescu octet is one of the most difficult to lead,” said Lee. “I’ve per-



formed it on a big stage, where I thrive and I feel good working with larger ensembles.”

Lee said she is always humbled to work with people like Hoopes, Huang and Thompson “because maybe they can do things I’m not as good at. I know I have to be at the top of my game. I have to make sure I can meet them at their level.”

Lee is looking forward to being back in Sarasota, where she spent at least five winters studying with the Perlman Music Program/Suncoast.

The opening program features Beethoven’s Piano Trio in G major, op. 1, no. 2; Strauss’ Sextet for Strings from “Capriccio,” op. 85; Shostakovich’s Prelude and Scherzo for String Octet, op. 11; and Mendelssohn’s Octet in E-flat major for Strings, op. 20. The “Fireworks” concert, in addition to the Enescu Octet, will feature Telemann’s Gulliver Suite in D major for two violins, and his Concerto for Four Violins in D major TWV 40:202; Tartini’s Sonata in G minor for Violin and Continuo, “Devil’s Trill”; and the Halvorsen (after Handel) Passacaglia in G minor for violin and viola. The final concert is a tribute to festival co-founder Derek Han, the longtime associate artistic director who died at 63 in 2021. It features musical friendships between Johannes Brahms, Antonin Dvorak and Harry Burleigh.

A pre-concert talk will be held 45 minutes before the start of each program. Tickets for each performance are \$60. Call 941-328-1300 or go to lamusicafestival.org for more information.

Pianist Wu Han, right, and her husband, cellist David Finckel, leaders of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, will be featured in the final concerts of the La Musica International Chamber Music Festival.

LISA-MARIE MAZZUCCO/PROVIDED BY LA MUSICA



Kristin Lee, who spent many winters in Sarasota as a participant of the Perlman Music Program/Suncoast, returns as one of the ensemble members for the final concerts of the La Musica International Chamber Music Festival.

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