



New artistic director to lead major changes to Sarasota's La Musica chamber Festival



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One of the leaders of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center has been named the new artistic director of Sarasota's La Musica International Chamber Music Festival in a move that signals some major changes coming to the organization.

Pianist Wu Han, who has performed six times for La Musica, will become only the second artistic director, succeeding Bruno Giuranna, who co-founded the organization with Derek Han in 1987. Wu Han performed at a memorial concert for Derek Han in April.

Derek Han, who died unexpectedly at age 63 last year, was the associate artistic director and widely expected to succeed the 89-year-old Giuranna when he retired. Giuranna has been

named artistic director emeritus.

Wu Han, who grew up in Taiwan, performs and records regularly with her husband, cellist David Finckel. Since 2004, they have been co-artistic directors of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, which got its start in 1969 with the opening of the cultural arts complex in Manhattan.

Her new appointment, will not impact her relationship with the New York ensemble, or several other organizations in which she has leadership roles.

“She’s electric. She is exciting. She is bold. She is thoughtful and she tries really hard to provide the best,” said Executive Director Joan Sussman, who worked with Wu Han for several years at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center. “She has connections that we could never have and the board was just elated when she came forth.”

Sussman said after seeing downward trends in ticket sales for the festival in the last few years, board members decided that “we needed to change. We needed to look for new artistic leadership, someone who had a personality and visibility.”



Giuranna has been unable to travel to the festival the last few years from his home in Italy because he is unvaccinated for the coronavirus, Sussman said.

As the organization prepares for its 37th season, “What we need now is not necessarily what was great 30 years ago or even three years ago. Covid changed everything and hastened this decision,” Sussman said.

Wu Han was chosen during an informal search because the organization “wanted a leader who would effect change in every dimension of our institution and increase our visibility,” board president Bruce Lehman said in a statement. “We chose Wu Han because of the breadth of her reputation, her commitment to engaging younger musicians and audiences and her sheer love of the chamber music canon.”

La Musica traditionally presents four chamber music concerts each April in the Sarasota Opera House in a format that has followed a similar pattern since its founding. That will change in the coming season.

In addition to the Chamber Music Society, Wu Han is co-artistic of the Music@Menlo Chamber Music Festival and Institute in California. She also helps to program classical concerts for The Society of the Four Arts in Palm Beach.

In addition to her artistic leadership , Wu Han said she travels about 280 days a year for concerts, including the Chamber Music Society and some duo concerts with Finckel.

La Musica's next season, which will add concerts in February and March, will be announced in the next few weeks, and the organization will introduce its subscribers and donors to Wu Han at a luncheon in mid-November.



In a telephone interview, Wu Han said audiences should expect to see “a completely different set of musicians that I have handpicked from around the world. What I hope to bring you under my direction is what I think is the best from around the world that Sarasota can hear. I have total confidence that if somebody comes to once concert and hears the artistic excellence, they will say ‘Wow, let me hear all of them.’”

Only three returning musicians are planned for the new season, including Wu Han and her husband. She said one program will be in association with the Van Cliburn Competition and another “is coming straight from the the Lincoln Center stage and specifically designed for my first year at La Musica.”

Wu Han said she had a soft spot in her heart for Sarasota and La Musica “because Derek Han was my dearest friend for a very long time.”

She said the concert seasons would not necessarily mimic those she programs in other cities.



“I would design programs for what’s best for Sarasota, and after the first year, I’ll have a chance to hear audience reaction to what I think to continue the journey to bring people closer to the greatness of this music,” she said.

Wu Han began musical studies in Taiwan and was playing concerts and winning competitions by age 12. She studied at the Hartt School in Connecticut and spent two summers at the Marlboro Music School and Festival. She has performed at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center and other major concert halls around the world.

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