

MUSIC

La Musica director plans major changes in new Sarasota chamber music season



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A new artistic director is shaking up traditions for a new season of Sarasota's La Musica International Chamber Music Festival, expanding into February and March and bringing in different roster of artists who the organization hopes will please longtime patrons and attract new audiences.

In October, La Musica announced the appointment of Wu Han, the pianist who leads the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center with her husband,

cellist David Finkel, as the new artistic director, succeeding founding director Bruno Giuranna, who has been named artistic director emeritus.

Since its founding in 1987, La Musica has traditionally presented a series of concerts in April at the Sarasota Opera House. For 2023, Wu Han is expanding the season to include two concerts in February and March at the Riverview Performing Arts Center, along with three more in April at the Opera House.



“Eventually, we want to offer the best concerts from January until the season is over. This area has the capacity,” she said in an interview during a brief visit to Sarasota to meet with board members and donors. “This program is specifically designed to build trust. There are unusual names in there. You may say, ‘I never heard of this person or this piece,’ but then you come and say, ‘I learned something and that was great’ and therefore we build trust. You have one good experience and hopefully you will come back.”

The concerts will feature a mostly new lineup of musicians.

Wu Han, who also serves as co-artistic director of the Music@Menlo Chamber Music Festival and Institute in California, and programs classical concerts for

The Society of the Four Arts in Palm Beach, said she is confident that audiences will respond to the season's programming.

"I've done this many times. I know that in the first season people will be so impressed with the quality of the work. I'm just very confident in the quality."

Following are descriptions of the season's five concerts.

'Rachmaninov Celebration'

7:30 p.m. Feb. 20 at Riverview. This concert marks the 150th anniversary of the composer's birth and the 80th anniversary of his death. Wu Han will perform with two 2022 Van Cliburn Competition medalists, Ukrainian pianist Dmytro Choni and Russian Anna Geniushene.

"This will be like a big piano celebration," Wu Han said. "For people who love the piano, this is the performance to come to." It features Rachmaninov's Suite No. 1 for Two Pianos, Op. 5, Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite for Two Pianos, Rachmaninov's arrangement of Tchaikovsky's "Lullaby" and Rachmaninov's Suite no. 2 for Two Pianos, Op. 17.

'Voices of the Americas'

7:30 p.m. March 13 at Riverview. This program features works by Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein and George Gershwin, as well as Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos, Mexican composers Manuel Ponce, Carlos Chávez and more.

"It's an evening about all Americans. Bernstein and Copland both visited South America and Cuba and picked up all kinds of melodies. It's a mix of American and South American flavor with unusual instrumentation," Wu Han said.

The program will feature soprano Jessica Rivera, pianists Michael Stephen Brown and Gilles Vonsattel, cellist Nicholas Canellakis and percussionist Ian David Rosenbaum.



‘Grand Opening’

7:30 p.m. April 8, Sarasota Opera House. The opening of the more traditional festival season features Felix Mendelssohn’s Octet in C major for Strings, Op. 7, as well as Beethoven’s Piano Trio in G major Op 1., No. 2 and Shostakovich’s Prelude and Scherzo for String Octet, op. 11. “We’re bringing in all the best string players and we want to show them off with the Mendelssohn octet,” Wu Han said.

In addition to Wu Han and Finckel, the first two April concerts will feature violinists Chad Hoopes, Paul Huang, Kristin Lee and James Thompson; violists Matthew Lipman and Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt and cellist Keith Robinson.



‘Fireworks’

7:30 p.m. April 11, Sarasota Opera House. After the Mendelssohn octet, this concert will feature another by Romanian composer George Enescu, which Wu Han describes as “another trust-building program. You heard one octet and now you’re going to hear another one and you’re going to love it.” The concert also features two pieces George Philipp Telemann, and works by Giuseppe Tartini and George Frideric Handel by way of Johan Halvorsen.

‘Grand Friendships’

5 p.m. April 15, Sarasota Opera House. Wu Han programmed this concert as a tribute to La Musica co-founder Derek Han, the longtime Associate Artistic Director who died last year. It will feature Brahms’ Piano quartet No. 3 in C minor, Op. 60, Antonin Dvořák’s Piano Quintet in A Minor, Op. 81 and American composer Harry Burleigh’s “Southland Sketches” for Violin and Piano.

“This one is all about friendship,” she said. Burleigh grew up singing, and found a job as a janitor at the National Conservatory, which was run by Dvořák, who arranged for the young artist to receive a scholarship, leading him to a career as a composer and church singer.

Season subscriptions are now available, and single tickets will go on sale Jan. 10 through the Sarasota Opera House box office, 941-328-1300; tickets.sarasotaopera.org/events. For more information on the season: lamusicafestival.org

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