

arts & entertainment

...on the Semiahmoo Peninsula



The Penderecki String Quartet will come to White Rock Concerts from Wilfred Laurier University in Ontario. (Contributed to Peace Arch News)

Concert season highlights classical masterworks

Alex Browne

Almost 70 years after it was founded by the late, legendary, bassoonist George Zukerman, the six-evening White Rock Concerts subscription series remains one of the best bargains around for the classical music lover.

Even for those who are relatively unfamiliar with the idiom, but want to learn more about it – music students, for example, or parents and other family members of music students, or people who have never enjoyed the exciting immediacy of a classical concert – it's an unmatched opportunity to experience a broad range of repertoire, live and unfiltered, in the hands of international-touring-level musicians.

At \$180 for the season, that's a low \$30 per evening – with the added bonus that, since all of the series' Saturday night performances are in our own backyard (at White Rock Baptist Church, 1657 140 St.), usual costs for concert-goers, such as transportation, parking, meals, etc. can be kept to a bare minimum.

Marcel Bergmann, who with his wife and fellow Bergmann Duo pianist Elizabeth continue



The CARION Wind Quartet from Denmark is among the professional touring ensembles participating in White Rock Concerts' 2024-25 season. (Contributed to Peace Arch News)

to serve as artistic directors for White Rock Concerts, said they, and organization president John Leighton, have been determined to keep the series' ticket cost low.

"It's wonderful that we've been able to keep it affordable," Marcel said.

For his part, Leighton said, the legacy established by Zukerman all those years ago could not be in better hands.

"The Bergmanns are doing a fabulous job in continuing it and maintaining the standard of concerts," Leighton added.

First offering of the 2024-25 season, on Oct. 19, is *Strings and Harp*, featuring Rosemary Thomson, conducting the John Avison Chamber Orchestra and

harpist Lani Krantz.

"Rosemary was formerly conductor of the Okanagan Symphony, and it's really great to have her as a new conductor for White Rock Concerts," Marcel said.

"The concert is largely folk-music influenced classical pieces, such as Grieg's *Holberg Suite*, Dvorak's *Serenade for Strings* and Ralph Vaughn-Williams' *Fantasia on Greensleeves*," Elizabeth added.

"We tend to think of folk music today as a singer and a guitar, but these pieces are all derived from the native music of the composers' countries."

Second concert of the season, on Nov. 16, features the solo piano of Jaeden Izik-Dzurko, who was described in a CBC broadcast in

2021 as one of "30 hot Canadian classical musicians under 30."

Aside from four scherzi by Chopin, he'll be playing largely Russian repertoire, including emotionally charged pieces by Rachmaninoff and Scriabin.

"We met him first as a teenage student, but he's since won some very renowned competitions in Europe, including the Hilton Head International Piano Competition," Marcel said.

Third concert, on Jan. 25, is *Elektra-fying*, spotlighting the celebrated style and verve of Vancouver's own Elektra Women's Choir and its conductor, Morna Edmundson, now in her 38th and final year leading the group.

"They're going to bring in a compelling concert featuring works by Schubert and Henry Purcell – it's wonderful to be able to have them with White Rock Concerts again after 27 years," said Elizabeth.

On Feb. 22, the series highlights celebrated Danish ensemble the CARION Wind Quintet.

"They're a very fresh and appealing, very well educated musically, and they will offer quite an exhilarating concert," Marcel

said. "They're playing Beethoven's *Quintet in E-flat Major*, and also Bartok's *Romanian Folk Dances*, Kavados' *Lezmer Dances* and even music by Brazilian composer Julio Medaglia."

On March 15, it's the turn of the Penderecki String Quartet, now going into a 20th year as quartet-in-residence at Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario.

"They're going to be bringing some very traditional classics to the White Rock audience – from Haydn's 'Sun' Quintet to pieces by Brahms and Debussy," Marcel said.

Rounding out the season, on April 26, will be a new extravaganza by the ever-creative Bergmanns: *Pocket Symphonies*.

Joined by violinist Jasper Wood and cellist Joseph Elworthy, the duo will take on possibly the most famous piece in the classical repertoire – Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* – in a special pocket version by Carl Burchard for one piano (four hands) and strings.

Also part of the same programme will be Mendelssohn's *Hebrides Overture* and a selection of Brahms' *Hungarian Danc-*

es, plus a few other pieces that demonstrate the versatility and richness of the piano-violin-cello combination.

As the Bergmanns point out, the publishing pocket versions of the masterworks was not uncommon in the 18th and 19th centuries, when many people had musical skills and frequently played for their own entertainment in small ensembles.

"Somewhere early in the last century, people became recipients rather than exponents of classical music," Marcel noted.

Nothing is lost in the pared-down versions, which manage to retain the full harmonic richness and spirit of the originals, he noted.

From a musician's standpoint, performing such cleverly chamber-sized versions of symphonic works today is also an exciting, educational experience, Elizabeth added.

"You get to look at this wonderful music from the inside-out," she said.

For information on subscribing to the series, visit whiterockconcerts.com or email membership@whiterockconcerts.com.