

arts & entertainment

...on the Semiahmoo Peninsula

White Rock Concerts returns with diverse music lineup

Alex Browne

"We should really have called this season 'Arrangements' because practically all the concerts feature special arrangements of music for different groups and ensembles," Elizabeth Bergmann said.

She was speaking about the upcoming season of White Rock Concerts, one of the longest-lived arts organizations on the Peninsula, now in its 69th year.

As artistic directors of the subscription concert series, she and husband and fellow pianist Marcel (the other half of the internationally acclaimed Bergmann Duo) continue to find new and exciting ways to present world-class classical music close to home.

In this, they follow the path pioneered by series founder, the late, legendary, bassoonist and impresario George Zukerman, who always championed the adventurous, in music and in life, even when he was well into his nineties.

At \$180 per seat for the season (and only \$60 for students up to the age of 25) it continues to be an unrivalled deal compared with the per-ticket price for other concerts of this calibre, and there is no longer the same waiting list to become members, which was the pre-COVID norm.

However, as series president John Leighton pointed out – during a recent conversation with the Bergmanns and *Peace Arch News* – early subscription is still highly recommended, as leaving it until the last minute can tend to make administering the current season, not to mention planning in advance for subsequent seasons, challenging for such a community-based organization.

Leighton also noted the coming season (which starts on Saturday, Oct. 18 at the usual venue, White Rock Baptist Church), is an unusual one.

"We always try to make a point of having one concert with an orchestral ensemble – but this year we have three," he said.

And as Marcel noted – with typical humour – the season demonstrates how the art of arranging (or orchestrating) can find exciting new textures not only in such masterworks as Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, but also in, as he puts it, "classi-fying" an enduring pop music piece, Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells*.

It's also, in timely manner, a proudly Canadian series, Leighton added, noting that all the artists – while of international stature – are all Canadian-born or based in Canada.

First concert of the season (on Oct. 18) will



Elizabeth and Marcel Bergmann are both artistic directors and performers for the 69th season of White Rock Concerts, which begins on Oct. 18. (Contributed to Peace Arch News)

feature the renowned Cheng Duo – siblings Bryan Cheng (cello) and Silvie Cheng (piano).

Their programme, entitled *Unravelling Ravel*, presents music by such impressionists as Spanish composer Manuel de Falla, French composers Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel and impressionism-adjacent Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky, in which the common linking thread is the influential work of Ravel.

Second concert (Nov. 29) presents the first ensemble of the season, The Pacific Baroque Orchestra, directed by Alexander Weimann, in his new arrangement of the *Goldberg Variations*, originally conceived for keyboard by Johann Sebastian Bach.

Weimann has found new voices and timbres for the famous and intriguing variations in a typically-baroque chamber ensemble of woodwinds, strings and harpsichord.

"He's a real early music scholar," said Marcel. "I found out that he studied musicology, like I did, in the same university in Germany, but maybe a year or two earlier than me."

Goldberg Variations, believed to have been written and dedicated to a harpsichordist Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, is "an unusually ex-

tended work even for Bach," Marcel said (Even if, as Elizabeth suggested, *The Art of Fugue* is longer, it remained unfinished at his death).

"It's extraordinary, if you think of the variety that Bach wrote into it," Marcel said.

"He was deeply into the mystery of threes – the Trinity symbolism speaks to his strong religious roots."

"But then, in the last variation, there's a certain amount of humour," Elizabeth noted.

"He took two folk tunes and combined them," Marcel agreed.

"So you go through this perfect, profound experience, and then Bach leaves you with a couple of folk tunes!"

Soulful Strings, with the series' resident ensemble, the John Avison Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Leslie Dala, also delves into the work of the orchestrator, featuring an arrangement of Franz Schubert's compelling *Death and the Maiden*.

"Schubert originally wrote it for a string quartet, but this version expands it for a full chamber orchestra," Elizabeth noted.

Another example of the possibilities of orchestration on the same programme will British composer Ralph Vaughn-Williams' *Fantasia on*

a theme by Thomas Tallis, a reimagining of a very early baroque work by the organist, who became court composer for Henry VIII and Elizabeth I.

A departure from the ensemble theme of the season will be the Feb. 28 concert by 20 year-old rising Canadian piano star Kevin Chen, who will run the gamut of virtuoso piano possibilities with a mix of Chopin, Liszt and Scriabin.

Continuing the Canadian theme the Ensemble Made in Canada (March 28) is a Juno award-winning piano quartet (pianist Philip Chiu, violinist Elissa Lee, violist Sheila Jaffe and cellist Trey Lee).

"These are all wonderful Canadian artists based in Ontario," said Elizabeth, noting that the concert will likely include some delightful quartets by French composers Gabriel Faure and Camille Saint-Saens, along with some shorter Canadian pieces commissioned by the ensemble.

Returning to orchestral sounds, the Bergmann Duo themselves will be joining Vancouver-based The Turning Point Ensemble for *Garlands of Spain* (April 18) which will premiere a new arrangement of the Mike Oldfield pop classic *Tubular Bells* by Marcel as well as a new piece he has written for two pianos.

"We did some coffee concerts with trombonist Jeremy Berkman of Turning Point and he pointed out there was something that sounds very Spanish about *Tubular Bells*," recalled Marcel.

This was the genesis for a concert that highlights Spanish and Spanish-influenced pieces, including De Falla's *El Amor Brujo* and *Spanish Garland* by Jose Evangelista, based on 12 Iberian folk melodies.

This is likely the fifth arrangement of *Tubular Bells* – something of a signature piece – Marcel has made over the course of his career, including a version for two pianos and even one for Carillon, a keyboard instrument made up entirely of fixed, tuned bells.

"This is the opposite of what used to be commonplace – taking a classical piece and 'lifting' it to become popular music," Marcel said.

"Instead we're taking popular music and 'classifying' it!"

For full information on subscribing for the season, visit the Facebook page White Rock Concerts Society, or the website whiterockconcerts.com, email membership@whiterockconcerts.com, or write to White Rock Concerts, P.O. Box 45089, RPO Ocean Park, Surrey, B.C. V4A 9L1.