

Prelude to a festival

The Astoria Music festival offers a taste of summer delights with its first-ever March Mini-Series

Story by DWIGHT CASWELL

The Astoria Music Festival has become what it is today — one of the finest music festivals not only in Oregon, but also on the West Coast — because Maestro Keith Clark insists on not following a formula. “Our reputation,” says Clark, “is as a developing, young and energetic festival that does unusual things well.”

If a significant work has never been performed in Oregon, or North America, you can count on it being

presented at the Liberty Theater. And if that festival is always held in June, why not offer a foretaste of summer delights in a mini-series of concerts in the spring?

And that’s how our homegrown festival is re-inventing itself in 2015, with what they are calling, logically enough, the March Mini-Series. It’s a chance to see and hear some of the talent that will be here in June.

The first concert featured lutenist and guitarist Hideki Yamaya, an Astoria Music festival favorite,

and his mentor, John Schneiderman, whom Yamaya now records with. They presented “Romantic German Music for Two Guitars” at Peace Lutheran Church.

Unfortunately, as you can tell from the past tense, the first concert has already happened. If you missed it, make sure you don’t miss the next two; both are at 3 p.m. at the Liberty Theater. The second concert features one of the most popular artists ever to play in Astoria, Sergey Antonov; the third and final performance should not be missed by anyone of Scandinavian descent.

Antonov, the “Cello Hero” of the music festival, along with Ilya Kazantsev on piano and Micha Keylin on violin are the Hermitage Piano Trio. They take the stage of the Liberty Theater Sunday, March 15 to play the music of Beethoven, Brahms, Rachmaninov and Schubert.

Micha Keylin has performed to consistent acclaim in 45 countries since his Carnegie Hall debut at the age of 11. Antonov won the International Tchaikovsky Competition, and Kazantsev won the International Chopin Competition in Moscow and the 2007 and 2008 World Piano Competition. Based in the United States but out of the great Russian musical tradition, this trio of remarkable musicians has recorded extensively and toured from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C., where The Washington Post reviewer said they, “turned in a performance of such power and sweeping passion that it left you nearly out of breath.”

A reception will be held after the concert, at which those who pay a little extra will have a chance



The Hermitage Piano Trio, featuring, from left, cellist Sergey Antonov, violinist Micha Keylin and pianist Ilya Kazantsev, will perform works by Beethoven, Brahms, Rachmaninov and Schubert on March 15 at the Liberty Theater.

Submitted photo

to meet the performers.

The following Sunday, March 22, the Astoria Music Festival presents an event that will stir the hearts of all those who trace their roots to Scandinavia. “From Finland with Love: Songs of my Great Grandfather” features rarely heard music by Jean Sibelius. The concert is part of a worldwide celebration of the 150th anniversary of the birth of Sibelius, held in association with UNESCO.

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Sibelius captured the spirit of Scandinavia as no other artist. More than most composers, and even more than most Finnish people, Sibelius was an avid student of nature, and it inspired his finest work. Perhaps it is for this reason that he approached the form and tonality of music in a unique fashion, for which he sometimes received critical rebuke. Sibelius’ response to such disparagement was classic: “Pay no attention to what critics say. No statue has ever been put up to a critic.”

Why “Songs of My Great Grandfather”? Because the pianist performing the pieces is Ruusamari Teppo, the great-granddaughter of Sibelius. Teppo

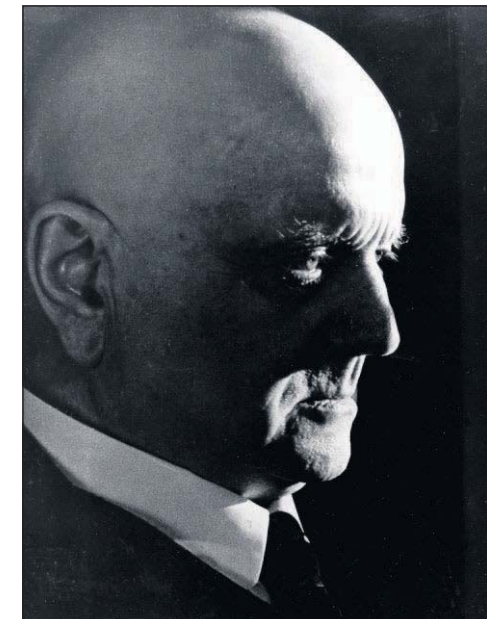
has performed as a soloist and chamber musician in this country, throughout Europe and in South Africa. She is joined by Jussi Makkonen, who will perform on an 18th century cello. Makkonen received his master’s degree in music from the Sibelius Academy and also has an impressive international resume.

The Finnish Brotherhood of Astoria will hold a post-concert reception, for which there will be no additional charge. Based on past performance, the reception will be well worth attending.

If after these events you feel your appetite whetted for the June festival, Maestro Clark promises a great show. “I am thrilled,” he says, “to bring this summer’s program to Astoria audiences. It’s a gathering of my best musical friends from the world’s greatest opera houses and symphony orchestras.”

The festival will present the Pacific Northwest premiere of Donizetti’s “Mary Stuart,” with America’s reigning queen of Bel Canto opera (and festival regular) Angela Meade as Mary, Queen of Scots. “She’ll lose her head at the end of course,” says Clark, “but so will the rest of us when we hear this incredibly beautiful music.”

There will also be two all-Beethoven nights, says Clark, “and much more coming soon. We’re building the greatest music festival on the West Coast.”



AP Photo

Finnish composer Jean Sibelius is shown in Finland in January 1938. The Astoria Music Festival’s March Mini-Series concert “From Finland with Love” is part of a worldwide celebration of the 150th anniversary of the composer’s birth.

Astoria Music Festival March Mimi-Series

HERMITAGE PIANO TRIO

3 p.m. Sunday, March 15

Liberty Theater

1203 Commercial St., Astoria

www.astoriamusicfestival.com

\$20 general admission, \$5 students

\$30 patron, includes post-concert reception with the artists

FROM FINLAND WITH LOVE

3 p.m. Sunday, March 22

Liberty Theater

1203 Commercial St., Astoria

\$15, includes post-concert reception



Photo courtesy of David Lee Myers

Celloist Sergey Antonov performs during the final celebrity chamber music matinee during last summer’s Astoria Music Festival. The award-winning cellist will be back in Astoria for a concert March 15 as part of the festival’s March Mini-Series.