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MUSIC TODAY AND TOMORROW

Local musicians explore the future of classical music

While backward-gazing classical music institutions slip further and further into cultural irrelevance — see, for example, the Eugene Symphony's season schedule, containing a total of two works by living composers — those who cherish the future of classical music can look to fountains of innovation such as the University of Oregon. Founded by UO composition professor Robert Kyr in 1993, the school's biennial **Music Today Festival** helps cultivate a new generation of musicians for whom classical music is a living tradition, not a musty museum of endlessly recycled warhorses. And via public performances — including more than 40 premieres, most by UO students — the festival, which takes place in various UO venues (for more info visit music.uoregon.edu/events/index.htm), gives Eugene audiences a glimpse into music's future.

Thursday, Feb. 28, this year's headlining ensemble, **PRISM Saxophone Quartet**, plays new classical and jazz music that has garnered awards for adventurous programming and performances in venues like Carnegie Hall. On Friday, March 1, **Beta Collide** (including UO profs **Brian McWhorter** and **Molly Barth**) joins one of the school's half-dozen new music groups, **turnEnsemble**. Their free concert includes new music by contemporary American composers, including present and former UO students. Saturday night's **Future Music Oregon** (at Thelma Schnitzer Hall in the Frohnmyer Music Building) features computer music.

Sunday's Beall concert featuring another student group, **Sospiro Vocal Ensemble**, introduces the festival's other major guest artist, **Estelí Gomez**. One of a new young breed of versatile singers equally at home on opera stages, in choruses and in ensemble or solo settings, the Santa Cruz-born chanteuse has garnered early acclaim for performances in prestigious venues around the world. She'll sing a song cycle by W. Franklin Price and four premieres of UO student choral works. On Monday, Gomez joins **Eugene Contemporary Chamber Ensemble** for premieres of their own works inspired by natural soundscapes — including one commissioned by Crater Lake National Park using field recordings made there — plus contemporary compositions by the great Alaska composer John Luther Adams, prominent French composer Tristan Murail and Seattle's Emily Doolittle.

For something completely different, on March 8, **The Paperboys** bring their traditional Irish sounds to Beall. That's the opening concert for the city's annual **Irish Cultural Festival**, which continues all day the next day at Sheldon High School.

There's also new music aborning off campus. On Sunday, March 3, at Unitarian Universalist Church (13th & Chambers), UO alum, composer, musician and puppet master **Ken Jennings** uses his Jeopardy winnings to — oops, wait, different KJ. Anyway, Jennings has long directed Gamelan Sari Pandhawa, dedicated to bringing contemporary and traditional Javanese gamelan music to the Eugene community. He's also a talented composer who has spent the last few years creating a shadow puppet show and concert retelling of one of European civilization's Urtexts: the Anglo-Saxon poem that tells the story of *Beowulf*. Jennings will narrate the epic tale in a mixture of Old and modern English, portraying the characters via shadow puppets drawn from the Javanese wayang kulit tradition. And at Springfield's Wildish Theater on March 4, **Chamber Music Amici** commendably adds new music — by a local composer, no less — to its standards with the world premiere of retired and respected long-time UO composition prof Hal Owen's new "Amici Quintet," plus Mozart's gorgeous "Oboe Quintet" and Beethoven's "Kakadu Variations" for piano trio.

If you like the old stuff, check out the **Eugene Concert Choir** and **Oregon Mozart Players'** performance of Bruckner's rarely performed "Mass No. 2 in E Minor," plus works by other hopeless Romantics — Schubert, Brahms and more, at the Hult Center on March 2. ■

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