

Astoria Music Festival features classical masterpieces

Angela Meade returns in Northwest premiere of Donizetti's 'Maria Stuarda'

ASTORIA — Once it launches on June 13, the 13th annual Astoria Music Festival maintains a busy, near-daily pace of concerts, recitals, discussions and films for 16 days. Fueled by the vision of Artistic Director Keith Clark, the festival traverses almost every classical form — orchestra, chamber music and opera — in venues throughout town.

Many of the performers are among the world's finest, attracted to the festival by its reputation for high quality and sense of community: a rare combination. Several events are free, and the festival delights residents and visitors alike. It draws audiences to Astoria from all along the Pacific coast, Portland to Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Artists

2015 festival artists include concertmasters of two of the West Coast's leading orchestras: Martin Chalifour of the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Sarah Kwak of the Oregon Symphony. Among the artists featured at the festival this year are pianist Cary Lewis of the Lanier Trio, who doubles as director of chamber music; ensembles-in-residence the Hermitage Piano Trio and Ensō String Quartet; and Metropolitan Opera star Angela Meade, a native of Centralia, Washington, now called "America's reigning queen of bel canto."

Singer-songwriter and local celebrity Israel Nebeker of Blind Pilot fame will make his Astoria Music Festival debut with an eclectic program of his and other composers' works. You can hear his "Night Music" on June 16.

The festival has built an identity with fully staged and opera-in-concert productions, drawing on Clark's reputation as an opera conductor and his ability to attract leading stars to the festival. This year's singers include sopranos Angela Meade, Alexandra



Submitted photo

The Ensō String Quartet features Melissa Reardon on viola, Maureen Nelson on violin, Richard Belcher on cello and Ken Hamao on violin. The ensemble performs June 27 during the Astoria Music Festival.



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The 2015 festival will feature Sarah Kwak, left, concertmaster of the Oregon Symphony, and Cary Lewis, of the Lanier Trio, who doubles as the festival's director of chamber music.

Deshorties, and Emily Pulley; mezzo-soprano Angela Niederloh; tenors Aaron Blake and Allan Glassman; and baritone Richard Zeller and Matthew Hayward, all with collective credits ranging from the Metropolitan Opera to Glimmerglass, Dallas Opera to Seattle Opera and Portland Opera.

Opera

The festival will feature the high-drama second act of Beethoven's only opera, "Fidelio" on June 21; Mozart's popular "The Magic Flute" on June 25 and 26, fully staged with an Astoria-themed set

and references; and, in its Pacific Northwest premiere, Donizetti's "Maria Stuarda" on June 28, in concert with Meade singing the bel canto lead opposite Deshorties as her lethal rival, Queen Elizabeth I.

Eugene Opera General Director Mark Beudert will lead the festival's Vocal Apprentice Program, whose young artists perform in all three operas.

Oratorio

The Astoria Music Festival presents the first major sacred work in its 13-year history with Bach's "St John Passion"

on June 20. Oliver Mercer sings Evangelist and Richard Zeller portrays Christus. The Ensemble of Oregon joins the Astoria Festival Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Keith Clark.

Orchestral

The festival's orchestral programming overflows with masterpieces and superb guest soloists. The schedule includes:

- Gala Opening All-Beethoven Concert on June 13 with his majestic Fifth Symphony and Martin Chalifour featured in the Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 61;
- Ilya Kazantsev performing Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 23 on the same program with Sibelius' iconic "Finlandia," in honor of that composer's 150th birth year on June 14; and
- Another all-Beethoven evening on June 21 with "Fidelio" and his Triple Concerto featuring the Hermitage Piano Trio.

Comprised of musicians from leading American ensembles, the Astoria Music Festival Orchestra is directed by Clark and includes members of the Oregon Symphony, Los Angeles and San Francisco Opera and Ballet orchestras, and the New York Philharmonic. Concertmas-

ters include Kwak and Roy Malan, concertmaster of the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra.

Chamber music and recitals

Pianist Cary Lewis leads four chamber music concerts featuring the Astoria Festival Chamber Players, the Ensō String Quartet and Hermitage Piano Trio, violinists Chalifour, Kwak, as well as violinist Anthea Kreston and cellist Jason Duckles of the Amelia Piano Trio.

Among the many chamber music highlights, with these superb musicians, is Sibelius' Piano Quartet in G minor on June 19 and his String Quartet in D minor, Op. 56, "Voces Intimes" on June 27, performed in honor of the 150th anniversary of his birth.

Instrumental Apprentices perform alongside their mentors, the Hermitage Piano Trio, in a free all-Mendelssohn program on June 22 that includes his Double Concerto, transcribed by cellist Sergey Antonov.

Special events

"An Elizabethan Garland" on June 17, with lute, theorbo, viola da gamba and voice recreating the music and spirit of the Renaissance courts of Queens Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart, sets the stage for the festival finale of "Maria Stuarda" on June 28.

Two magnificent Rodgers organs, on special loan from Rodgers Instruments in Hillsboro, will accompany the cast-of-thousands silent film "Wings" on June 18, saluting the Liberty Theater's

silent-era glory days, and in recital by internationally renowned organist Hector Olivera on June 27.

Free community events include KMUN's "Classic 4 Kids" live radio show with audience on June 27, Vocal Apprentice recitals in Astoria's historic churches, and several lectures and concert previews.

About the festival

Co-founded in 2003 by Artistic Director Keith Clark (with Ruth Dobson), the Astoria Music Festival has established a reputation for a level of music excellence one seldom finds in a town of 10,000. Under Clark's direction, the festival has become known for its vibrant mix of symphonic, chamber music, operatic and other musical genres, presented in Astoria's historic Liberty Theater and Clatsop Community College Performing Arts Center.

The 2015 season takes place June 13 to 28. Major supporters this year include the Meyer Memorial Trust, Oregon Community Foundation, Oregon Arts Commission, the city of Astoria, and in-kind support from Rodgers Instruments, The Daily Astorian and All Classical Media.

Festival passes cost \$90 to \$355. Single tickets cost \$15 to \$45 ("Maria Stuarda" tickets cost \$30 to \$85). Tickets are available at the Astoria Music Festival box office at 1271 Commercial St. or by calling 503-325-9896. For more information, visit www.astoriamusicfestival.org

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