

Astoria welcomes back its *musical heroes*

14th Astoria Music Festival showcases cellist, soprano and a \$1.7 million violin — plus a tribute to David Bowie

By **PATRICK WEBB**
FOR COAST WEEKEND

Heroes is one theme for this year's Astoria Music Festival. Change could be another.

The three-week program begins Saturday, June 18 and features 13 concerts and operas.

The 14th year sees a new board of directors that regrouped after last summer's leadership conflict. Artistic Director Keith Clark doesn't dwell on the changes, acknowledging that there were differences that he and those remaining want to put behind them. Leena Riker, Dwight Caswell, Craig Holt, Michael Foster and Doug Westervelt have provided organizational continuity. Others who have joined the board include Dr. Bill Armington, Jeanne Peterson, John Orr and Sarah Nebeker.

"The festival will be great again, the program is more varied than during some earlier years, and should be of interest to younger audiences as well," said Riker, former board president.

The Liberty Theater, the Clatsop Community College Performing Arts Center and Grace Episcopal Church are among the venues.

Events begin with a 4 p.m. matinee Saturday featuring cellist Sergey Antonov, violinist Elizabeth Pitcairn and pianist Cary Lewis with a selection of works by Mendelssohn, Grieg and Dvorak. Antonov will be back in the spotlight at 7:30 p.m. as solo-



PHOTO BY DWIGHT CASWELL

Artistic Director Keith Clark will conduct Saturday's gala evening concert, which features Philip Glass' 1996 Symphony No. 4 "Heroes," as well as Sunday's rendition of Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 "Eroica."

ist on Elgar's Cello Concerto.

The son of two Moscow cellists learned the instrument from age 5. Clark recalls American cello teacher Terry King telling him in 2010, "If you want to get on the ground floor of the next generation of cellists, there is a really remarkable Russian student who is putting the polishing touches on his preparation. I can guarantee you will love this guy." "Based on that

recommendation, I brought Sergey in sight unseen, and everything that Terry forecast came true," Clark said.

The concert will feature the Music Festival Orchestra performing Philip Glass' 1996 Symphony No. 4 "Heroes," based on the late David Bowie's 1977 album of the same name.

Clark has never conducted Glass' music, but describes him as "the

Beethoven of our time," an American composer especially well regarded in Europe. Despite his work often being called "minimalist music" — a label that Glass detests — this piece calls for the largest number of instrumentalists Clark has assembled at the Liberty. (He thinks it will be about 50.) "It will be an amazing sound."

"The song 'Heroes' is considered one of the greatest pieces of rock 'n' roll music of the 20th century," said Clark. "David Bowie was a multifaceted, talented artist — more than just a rock 'n' roll guy. He did so many things with so many musical styles."



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Elizabeth Pitcairn will perform 4 p.m. Sunday, June 19 on the 1720, \$1.7 million Mendelssohn Stradivarius violin.

Another "star" of the opening weekend is a \$1.7 million violin played by former child prodigy Elizabeth Pitcairn. The 1720 Mendelssohn Stradivarius was bought by her grandfather at Christie's auction in London in 1990 and inspired the movie "The Red Violin."

Clark met Pitcairn as a student in Los Angeles years ago. "She was very spectacular as a young teenager and she's grown into an international special virtuoso.

"She could make beautiful music on a cigar box," said Clark, crackling with laughter. "The fact that she has a most beautiful violin makes it even better."

The heroes theme continues with Sunday's rendition of Beethoven's Symphony No. 3.

The "Eroica" ("heroic") was dedicated to Napoleon, although Beethoven report-

edly changed his mind when the Frenchman proclaimed himself emperor. Clark first conducted it in his early 20s. "I have been living with this my entire life. Every day I open the score I discover something new. It's one of those miracles of human thought, beautiful, technical — so exciting.

"The mechanics are phenomenal. Deep and profound heights of joy, such a depth of sorrow in the second movement, which is a funeral march, and then the third is a scherzo — a dance, the happiest music you will ever hear."

Clark said the visceral piece was pivotal. "It changed the course of music history," becoming louder, displaying unbridled energy — no longer just polished notes to please the aristocracy of Europe — and set the stage for Brahms and

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