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ASTORIA MUSIC FESTIVAL LAUNCHES 15TH SEASON

PHOTO BY DWIGHT CASWELL

Above: Award-winning cellist Sergey Antonov, lower left, performs with the Astoria Music Festival orchestra under the direction of Keith Clark, right, in 2015.

FROM CLASSICAL TO INDIE, POP AND FOLK, THE STAR-STUDED EXTRAVAGANZA MAKES A JOYFUL NOISE

By **DAN HAAG**
FOR COAST WEEKEND

The Astoria Music Festival will celebrate its 15th anniversary over three weekends, from Sunday, June 11, through Sunday, June 25.

Venues will be The Liberty Theatre, Grace Episcopal Church and Clatsop Community College Performing Arts Center. Nearly one hundred performers will gather in Astoria for 15 performances of symphonic, operatic, chamber and popular music.

Widely acclaimed for performances of opera and vocal music, the festival's 2017 schedule brims with opportunities to savor this musical celebration.

Keith Clark, the festival's artistic director, looks forward to the effect of large groups performing with gusto on small stages.

"The loud parts raise the roof," he said. "This is heavy metal classical music."

Just 25 feet

Some of the festival highlights include: a performance by Metropolitan Opera sensation Angela Meade in her first Oregon solo recital; a mash-up of American folk music and Beethoven featuring the North Coast's own Israel Nebeker; and young American soprano Meagan Martin as Rosina in a staging of "The Barber of Seville," a comedic opera that Clark calls the funniest thing in all of classical music.

The production features baritone Deac Guidi, Astoria resident and music festival board president.

The festival will also host the Oregon premiere of Philip Glass' "Icarus At The Edge Of Time," a multimedia extravaganza combining large orchestra, film and narration that trans-

forms ancient myth into a sci-fi spectacular.

While the Astoria Music Festival features some of the finest performers from the United States, it is also a global affair, attracting international performers: Ukrainian violinist Solomiya Ivakhiv, Italian violinist Roberto Cani and Mexican baritone Luis Ledesma.

In particular, Clark hopes attendees have a chance to catch Meade's opening night solo performance.

Meade, one of the most prominent American operatic sopranos on the scene, has performed around the world. A native of Centralia, Wash., she has performed at the Astoria Music Festival in years past, and her first appearance at the festival was at the beginning of her prestigious career.

Clark said Meade loves the idea of being able to "come home" to the Pacific Northwest after what can be a grueling international per-

formance schedule.

"She is one of the most prominent singers of her generation, as big a star as you can be in the operatic world," he said. "Come see her at the Liberty and you can be just 25 feet from her."

Beethoven And Blue Jeans

One of the more interesting performances promises to be "Beethoven And Blue Jeans."

Set for the evening of Thursday, June 22,

at the Liberty Theatre, the show is an eclectic mash-up of classical and alt-folk featuring Nebeker, Blind Pilot's nationally recognized singer-songwriter, along with festival artists and a string quartet.

It's a classical jam where Nebeker joins cellist Sergey Antonov, pianist Ilya Kazantsev, and the debut of the Young Virtuosi String Quartet performing new arrangements of Nebeker's songs.

Nebeker said this type of performance comes with challenges, but he is eager to participate.

"It's fun to get to branch out and collaborate out of the comfort zone I'm typically involved in," he said.

While it's a chance for musicians from different genres to experiment and meld, Clark says it is also an opportunity for attendees to let their hair down.

"There won't be any tuxedos," he said, adding that the audience can enjoy a beer, sit back and watch a variety of musicians mix things up a bit.

This is Nebeker's second time performing at the festival. He said classical programs and festivals around the country have been branching out and trying to incorporate other musical elements such as indie, pop and folk.

The hope is to bring in different audiences who may not otherwise go to an all-classical music festival.

"You don't have to be in a stuffy tie to come and enjoy a show," he said.

Fertile ground

The festival doubles as a reunion of sorts.

Clark says that many of the performers return each year, not only to perform but to rekindle friendships with one another and residents of the community.

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