



COLIN MURPHEY PHOTO

Local visual artist Darren Orange will create a painting onstage to the accompaniment of cellist Sergey Antonov and pianist Ilya Kazantsev.

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And Sunday, June 24, brings a fully-mounted production of Giacomo Puccini's "Tosca" at the Liberty.

Not only is Puccini's classic opera the centerpiece of the Festival — "we've done 29 operas in 16 years, but this is our biggest," Clark said — but, in three key aspects, it represents the essence of the Music Festival in glorious microcosm.

Vocal heroes

First is the star power. The three main roles are assayed by a trio of heavyweights direct from New York's Metropolitan Opera: tenor Allan Glassman, baritone Richard Zeller and, in the title role, world-renowned dramatic soprano Angela Brown, making her Festival debut.

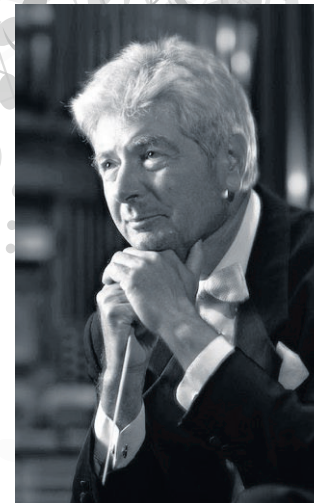
"She's a really big name — one of the great divas of our time — and this is her signature role," Clark said. "And Glassman and Zeller, who have performed with us many times, are every bit her equal as Met-level singers, so to hear the three of them together in this very dramatic opera will be awesome."

Adding to the excitement is the last-minute addition of famed Hungarian-born Maestro Imre Palló as conductor. "He's one of the old-school conductors," Clark said. "It's thrilling to add him to our roster."

Second is the local angle. For all the international talent on hand, it wouldn't be the Astoria Music Festival without its share of Astorians. And it would hardly seem fair to bring opera to town without local vocal hero Deac Guidi, who sings the role of Sacristan in "Tosca."

"I'm sort of the comic relief," Guidi said. "Which means I'm only really in the first half of the show. I don't know if you realize this, but operas tend to get a little dark as they go."

Guidi's centrality to the Festival, however, belies his modesty. President of the



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LEFT: Concert saxophonist Chika Inoue RIGHT: Conductor Imre Palló BELOW: Soprano Angela Brown



generously donated the space for them to stay for the full three weeks, which is very much in the spirit of the Festival. With all of the financial limitations we're under, we couldn't do this without the generosity of the residents of Astoria, who open up their homes to us every year."

The resumption of the Apprentice Program represents both an infusion of new blood and a return to the AMF's roots, as the Festival culminates in two performances by the young singers and musicians of — you guessed it — "The Marriage of Figaro."

"It all comes full-circle," Guidi said.

The logistical and financial challenges of wrangling dozens of artists from around the world each summer are unsurprisingly formidable, but to Clark and the many who make the Music Festival possible, they wouldn't have it any other way.

"Classical music, especially in the United States, is thought of as an elitist thing, something you have to get dressed up for that costs you a lot of money, but it doesn't have to be that way," Clark said. "It should be accessible to everyone, and that's what we're striving for. It nurtures and enriches all of us."

For more information, visit the Festival's website at astoriamusicfestival.org.

AMF board of directors, he has also been a key component of the Festival from the beginning.

"I was involved with the very first student production at the old Liberty Theatre back in 2003, as the Count in Mozart's 'The Marriage of Figaro,'" Guidi said. "It was my first real operatic performance as well, and it all grew from there."

Not an elitist thing

Which brings us to the third and, in some ways, most important aspect: the nurturing of fresh talent. The smaller roles in "Tosca" are made up of members of the AMF's Apprentice Program, a group of 18 pre-professional singers and musicians mentored by the more experienced soloists in the Festival.

"We had to suspend the program the last two years because we were unable to provide student housing for them," Clark said. "But Chester Trabucco, the proprietor of the Riverwalk Inn, has very

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