

REVIEW

Astoria Music Festival sparkles with class acts

An impressive violinist shines

By PATRICK WEBB
For The Daily Astorian

Astoria Music Festival discovered a new star this past weekend.

Ten years after delightful and impressive Russian cellist Sergey Antonov rocked the house, he was joined by another skilled musician who is already an Astoria favorite after two concerts.

Violinist Maureen Nelson wowed the opening-night audience June 16 with a skilled rendition of Debussy's Sonata for Violin and Piano, blending in delightful symmetry with veteran pianist Cary Lewis.

Twenty-four hours later, barely time to oil her bow, she was back on the stage of the Liberty Theatre performing the violin solo in Vaughn Williams' "Lark Ascending."

Saturday, the hush was palpable in the auditorium as her controlled bow-work and fleet fingering coaxed the sweetest, highest notes of pastoral reverence out of the British composer's masterwork.

As it concluded, the standing ovation surely tested whether the historic theater's roof was fastened on properly. The only pity was there were only 230 souls to share an experience that was as close to religious as a secular venue will allow. Nelson was presented with a colorful bunch of flowers; she deserved the entire garden.

"Lark Ascending" was inspired by the 1881 poem by George Meredith, which places the elegance of the skylark in the context of the English countryside. Williams composed his popular piece in 1914 just as the greatest unnecessary carnage in the modern era began. And, with hindsight, "The War To End All Wars" wasn't.

Under the careful baton of

Keith Clark, the Astoria Music Festival Orchestra played their part with significant precision. This was a team effort, after all. Yet during Nelson's sweet solos, when they rested their own violins or cellos, young and old musicians gaped with open-mouthed awe at what they were hearing, while on the podium Clark personified a respectful stillness.

As concertmaster, violin expert Olivia Tsui, the California-based professional, has become the festival's indispensable presence over the past eight years. Inches away from Nelson — though staring at her back, because of their positions on the stage — Tsui beamed with appreciation and approval.

At one point, during a softer part of the orchestra's score, Nelson seemed so entranced that her whole person swayed, her right hand briefly raising her bow as if to conduct the other players. A French horn sounded and her intensity in the moment went right back completing the job at hand.

Nelson was a child prodigy now with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. She made her festival debut with the Grammy-nominated Enso String Quartet in 2015. The audience reaction this past weekend downright demands that organizers had better contact her booking agent right away for 2019 and thereafter.

Three weeks of music

Likely none of the 125 who streamed out into the Astoria streets afterward would have thought it a "soft" opening to three weeks that promise some stellar music, including a concert version of Puccini's "Tosca" with internationally regarded soprano Angela Brown on Sunday and a couple of versions of "The Marriage of Figaro" June 29 and July 1. It is hard to believe that Mozart's naughty tale began it all in Astoria, remarkably 16



Patrick Webb/The Daily Astorian

Violin soloist Maureen Nelson soaks up her standing ovation after her second appearance at the Astoria Music Festival Saturday night.

years ago.

Antonov's contribution was suitably impressive. His powerful control of Saint-Saens' cello concerto drew well-deserved applause. The piece, which Rachmaninoff and Shostakovich maintained is the best but most difficult in the repertoire, was in good hands. As they played and conducted, his and Clark's heads nodded in unison, their chemistry evident, two masters at their craft. Antonov will appear more later, notably with painter Darren Orange on Saturday and a Bach series Tuesday.

Earlier in the night, Clark's jaunty baton sped the orchestra through the Eighth Symphony, his favorite but most Beethoven fans' third or fourth most memorable symphony, with a terrific blend of sound, especially in

the call-and-response passages between the strings and flutes, plus some crisp timpani work by Florian Konzetti.

Oboe player Melissa Peña was another standout. The assistant professor from Eugene has been playing at the festival since 2010, seizing on isolated solo passages to demonstrate mastery of the wind instrument she teaches at the University of Oregon. "I love coming here for the music — and the people," she said afterward. "It is phenomenal music with great colleagues. This town inspires us to make music."

Sandwiched between these two shows was a "happy hour" matinee concert best described as "eclectic." The centerpiece was the saxophone work of Chika Inoue. Considerably aided with her timing, pac-

ing and volume by pianist Ilya Kazantsev, she exemplified how an instrument not usually associated with chamber music can delight. The other "star" on display during her three pieces was the Liberty's acoustics.

'I Hate Music'

The festival gives an opportunity for college students to showcase and perfect their skills, a program begun by Ruth Dodson and continued by Tsui, Mark Ross Clark, Chuck Dillard and Kosta Popovic.

Madeline Jentsch looked nervous for about a millisecond. But the cheeky operatic manner in which the elfin dynamo delivered Leonard Bernstein's cycle of five children's songs (amusingly called "I Hate Music") demonstrated that here is a poised talent who, if properly nurtured, can write her own ticket in any genre of vocal performing. Not surprisingly, the talented Cincinnati student will sing Suzanna, the lead in "Figaro," as the festival wraps up.

Another highlight was the world premiere of "Daybreak for String Quartet" by Todd Mason, festival composer-in-residence for the second year. Mason said he was so captivated while taking photos around Astoria last year that he went home to Los Angeles and penned the unusual piece, which Tsui's string quintet, consisting of Anna Corcoran (violin), Peter Jandula-Hudson (viola), Rowena Hamill (cello) and Tyler Abbott (bass), performed with grace and vigor.

"They did a fantastic job," said the composer, Mason, who shunned the limelight and directed applause back to the performers. "They rehearsed quite hard. It's a difficult piece because of all that pizzicato." Astoria inspired his work. "It was a piece inspired by sunrises and sunsets."

The sparse matinee audience — 125 tickets were sold,

but Saturday's sunshine kept the true house to about 70 — was ready to appreciate any skill demonstrated. At one point, Agnieszka Laska, the festival's loyal stage manager, garnered applause when she dexterously picked up three bulky metal music stands in her right hand then three in her left hand to clear space for the next performers.

The hard-working Laska acknowledged the impromptu kudos with a cheeky grin. Her more elevated skill — as a creative choreographer — will be on display June 30 when her Laska Dancers perform "Oregon Bird Sketches." Like so many, she wears a number of "hats." Tsui will be doing double duty as director and violinist Wednesday at a program of chamber music with works by Mason and Clark.

And spare a thought for Kazantsev, a Russian contemporary and colleague of Antonov, whose dynamic piano playing has brought yet another sparkling international element to the Oregon Coast.

For the first concert, with featured Antonov, Nelson and Lewis performing Trio No. 1 by Saint-Saens, he sat unobtrusively at Lewis's side and acted as his sheet music page turner. Talk about overqualified! Lewis has done this for him in a prior year, so perhaps it evened the score.

But when it was time for the audience to applaud the talented trio's musicianship, Kazantsev stepped unobtrusively sideways so he was hidden by the raised lid of the piano.

True, this was not his moment. But in that modest gesture he proved that there were four truly class acts on stage.

Patrick Webb is a former managing editor of The Daily Astorian and part of Coast Community Radio's remote broadcast team for the Astoria Music Festival.

A new monument to dairy opens in Tillamook

A celebration, with cheese and ice cream

By JORDAN WOLFE and
MAX KIRKENDALL
Tillamook Headlight Herald

TILLAMOOK — Let them eat cheese — and ice cream, yogurt, butter and probably sour cream. The new Tillamook Creamery opened to the public on Wednesday.

The renovated visitor center — at about 42,800 square feet — was designed by the Seattle-based architecture firm Olson Kundig and offers an abundance of new features.

A larger dining area has more indoor seating and a spacious outdoor patio. There is an expanded ice cream counter and new coffee and yogurt bars. A revamped



A new visitor center has opened at the Tillamook Creamery.

menu has grilled-cheese sandwiches, wood-fire pizzas and Pacific Northwest wine and beer.

The monument to dairy has been under construction for the past year and a half. The farmer-owned cooperative typically draws about 1.3 million visitors a year.

"This new visitor's center will serve as a greeting card

not just for Tillamook but the entire state of Oregon," Gov. Kate Brown said at a ribbon-cutting ceremony Tuesday.

Brown, who confessed her two favorite foods are cheese and ice cream, spoke of the dairy industry's impact on the state. The governor gave accolades to Bruce Cardin's 1997 sixth-grade class for helping make milk Oregon's state beverage.

Eight-year-old Juliana McCoy traded in a day at camp for a visit to the grand opening with her mom that included a picture with Brown. Her visit was sweetened with one of Tillamook's famous ice cream

cones, and in the visitor center's Farm Room, she tried to beat the average 21 seconds it takes a professional to prep a cow for milking.

"It was worth it," McCoy declared.

With \$778 million in gross revenues last year, the Tillamook County Creamery Association is the largest co-op in Oregon, employing nearly 900 people. Its approximately 90 farm families — mostly from the Tillamook

area — own the cooperative and provide the milk for the cheese, ice cream, yogurt and other products.

"This is our modern day commitment to growth and giving back," said Patrick Criteser, the president and CEO of the creamery association. "We can all agree the end result far exceed expectations."

Gail Oberst of the Capital Press contributed to this report.

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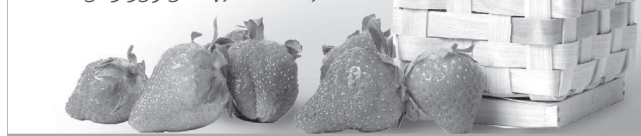
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