

# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

# Playing in three dimensions

I was ready. And a little nervous. But mostly ready.

They were waiting, there to listen. I began to play.

This was my end of semester viola jury performance. I was a freshman at Linfield College.

While I don't remember everything, I do remember the elated feeling after playing the last note in a movement from one of the Bach suites.



**JONATHAN WILLIAMS**

I had practiced diligently, though I still felt a little like a tribute in "The Hunger Games," proving my skills.

The most rewarding part? The feedback.

Years later, I still have

the pages of notes from jury members rating my playing and providing feedback on things like tone, technique, musicianship and presentation.

As a young person, it was nerve-wracking going before professors at the top of their field. Their feedback was generous, sharp and honest. I am a better player because of it. Feedback is something we all deserve. It helps us strive for better.

Young musicians will have the chance to get this kind of feedback — and win prizes — at the new Astoria International Chamber Music Competition.

The brainchild of cello mainstay Sergey Antonov, the competition will be held next June as part of the Third Dimension festival at the Liberty Theatre.

His goal? To bring a new, younger generation to the Liberty stage. And to make Astoria one of the important places in the Pacific Northwest for classical music.

This is big. Many of the world's leading classical music competitions take place in large U.S. and international cities. I have no doubt this will put the North Coast on the map.

Antonov is no stranger to music competitions. He's competed in and won many, including gold at the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, Russia. Pianist Ilya Kazantsev and violinist Misha Keylin, colleagues with Antonov in the Hermitage Piano Trio, which played at the Liberty in November and will lead next summer's festival, are also veterans of prestigious competitions and top players.



Jonathan Williams/The Astorian

The Hermitage Piano Trio during a concert at the Liberty Theatre in November. From left, cellist Sergey Antonov, violinist Misha Keylin and pianist Ilya Kazantsev.

### HOST A MUSICIAN

Liberty Theatre homestay host application: [bit.ly/3dZWNnq](https://bit.ly/3dZWNnq)

Antonov's focus for the competition is innovative: the musicians invited to perform in the festival will judge the competition, allowing the young musicians to see them perform.

Who can compete? Musicians ages 18 to 30. Ensemble sizes can range from three to five players, such as an instrumental/woodwinds duo with piano; piano/string trios; piano/string quartets; piano quintets; and mixed ensembles up to quintet.

To participate, performers will submit a live, unedited 15 to 20 minute video with two compositions of different styles. Ten ensembles will advance to the semifinal round at the Liberty, with three ensembles advancing to the final round. There will be cash prizes for the top three selected by the jury, with \$4,000 as the top prize and an invitation to perform at the festival next year. An audience favorite from the finals will also receive a cash prize.

Performers will get written feedback from the judges. Panelists will consist of members of the Hermitage Piano Trio, Jennifer Crockett, the executive director of the Liberty Theatre, and four other musicians.

Many Astorians know Antonov from his days as a leading cellist in concerts with the Astoria Music Festival. While

that festival has not been active in the past few years, this one is fresh. New. Exciting.

"I love Astoria. It's been more than 10 years of me coming here, and I just love the people, love the music, love the theater," Antonov said of his inspiration for starting the festival and competition.

Speaking at his trio's performance last month at the Liberty, Antonov was fun, instructive and easy to understand in describing musical ideas.

This is what classical music should be.

The concert was terrific. The trio played with power, passion and a deep command of the music. They were vibrant.

Who was turning the pages for Kazantsev on piano? Crockett. She is also helping put on the festival competition with Antonov.

She said they will be promoting the competition at regional colleges and through websites, newsletters and local papers beginning in January. Performers will have until May 1 to submit their performance video.

She sees the competition as not being as high stakes as others in the beginning. "I think the first couple of years it's about building this competition," she said.

Crockett noted the benefits of playing under some pressure. "The more you can do that as a performer, not really the easier it becomes but the more you're able to manage it," she said. "And I think being able to receive feedback and look at your performance critically, I think those are all really useful skills."

While Antonov wasn't ready to dis-

close music selections for the festival yet, he said they are planning for an exciting lineup. "We're always trying to impress the Astoria community with our selections," he said. "And again, there's so many ideas, so we'll try to bring variety, we'll try to bring interesting stuff, we have some more serious ideas."

A series of eight nights of concerts in August with the trio served as a test run for next year's festival. Antonov said it was "fantastic because it was one of the first live performances that we did after 16 months of silence so everybody was beyond excited about it."

The festival title is telling. It was born out of the coronavirus pandemic. Antonov described it as "where the whole world sort of switched to screens, Zooms, and we lost the most important thing, which is the human interaction in a three-dimensional form."

He noted how difficult the pandemic has been on artists and musicians, and still is.

"I think when we move further away from COVID, thankfully, it's still going to be a celebration of us hearing live music, hugging and shaking hands and celebrate the most important part of living, which is the human relationship and interactions," Antonov said.

Astoria will be the richer for this. Locals, too, will have a chance to get to know participants more closely if they choose to offer their home up for a homestay.

The benefits for the performers are many. Besides performing in a beautiful, acoustically rich venue and getting to know Antonov, Kazantsev and Keylin, they'll have a chance to enjoy the town and its concert patrons. "I think they'll be getting the chance to perform for an audience that really wants to see them," Crockett said. "... And a lot of these ensembles probably will eventually tour in the future."

Chamber music is the right choice for the times we're living in. It's intimate. Personal. Moving. I still remember the chamber music classes I took in college. It makes you a better musician. You listen more closely. Feel the music more deeply. Understand your role more clearly.

Antonov's goal should be everyone's north star: giving more young people opportunities in the arts.

Jonathan Williams is the associate editor of The Astorian.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Priorities

Great paper!

Both our major political parties purport to be for the working class, and yet both seem to fall short in delivery.

I'm still a supporter of the Democrats, because I feel some of their failures have been the result of Republican obstruction.

What drives me into the Democratic camp is looking at priorities. Republicans always seem to prioritize tax cuts that disproportionately favor the rich. Democrats prioritize improvement in health care and rebuilding the country.

That's what drives my loyalty to the Democrats.

JAMES HEFFERNAN  
Tillamook

### A holiday wish

The streets are wet. The day grim and chilly with a misty rain. It makes you want to curl up inside. But this is an average autumn or winter day on the North Coast.

You push the wetness aside and go into your day embracing it and the excitement of the season.

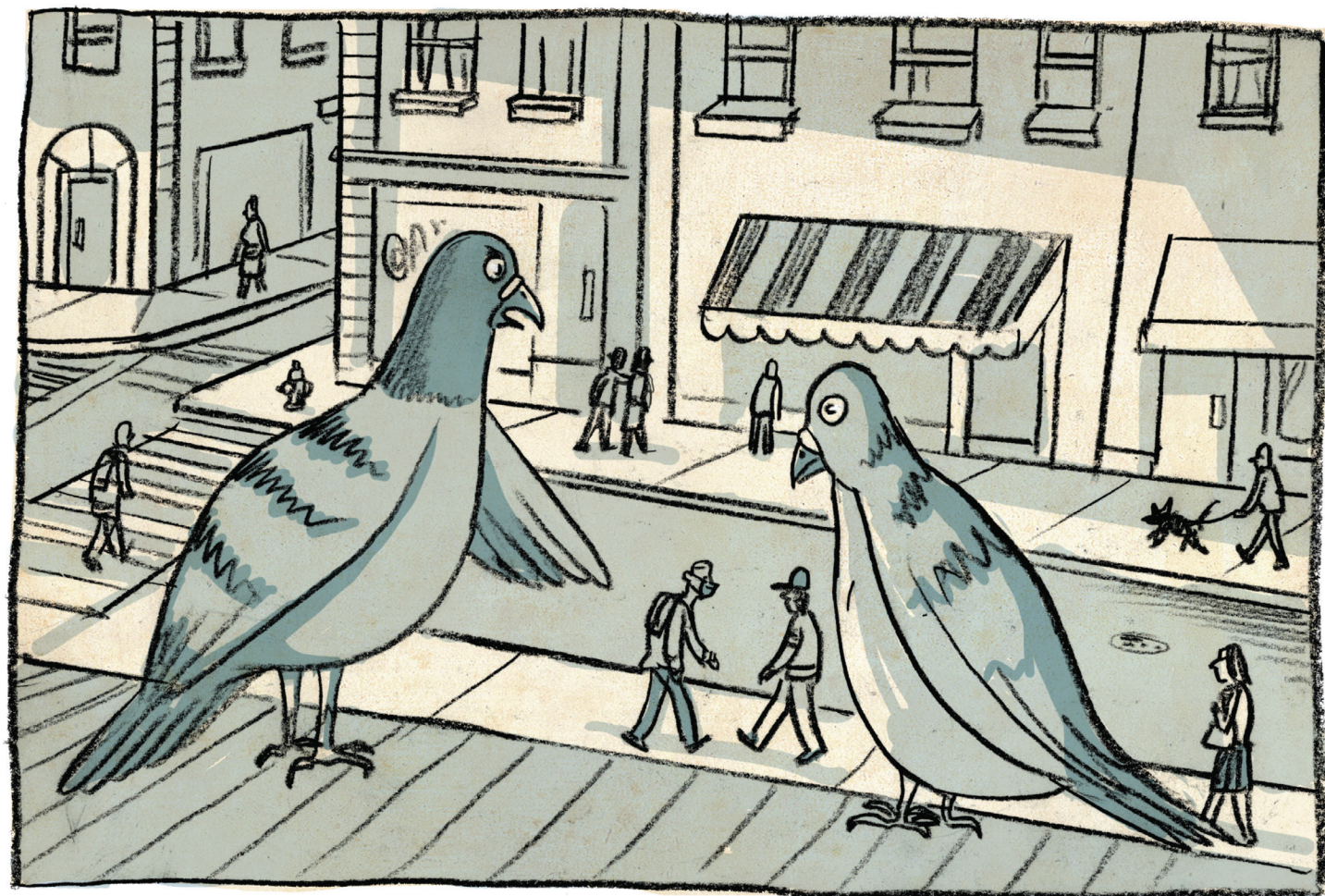
To me, the season starts in September with the first pumpkins on display. Even though many days are sunny this time of year, the expectations of the approaching times are high. First comes Halloween followed by the big holidays of Thanksgiving and Christmas.

These past two years have been tough with sickness from COVID, political division and economic loss. The thought of a third year with the virus is depressing, however, even with all this most people are optimistic and trudge on.

Most will survive as we have done in the past. How we survive is up to us. Will we bicker, trying to protect our own interest, or will we try to do good for all of society?

My holiday wish is for a kindness and understanding of each other. I feel this is the true spirit of the holidays and of life.

As surely as the rain comes and the leaves fall, time will pass. My wish is to



KUPER

"People aren't real."

carry on the holiday excitement and love. Think of the precious children closest to us and how perfect we want the world for them.

NORM HOOGE  
Astoria

### Pot calls kettle black

Concerning "Kotek scores several big wins" (The Astorian, Dec. 14): For state House Speaker Tina Kotek to publicly state that she is running for governor because "it's time to get past the politics of division" is the equivalent of me stating that "Donner, Blitzen and Rudolph are parked on my roof right now, and there is

a big fat guy (politically incorrect description, but it fits my body type, also) trying to go down my chimney."

Kotek is the poster child of a super hyperpartisan politician who has never hyperpartisan a chance to run over a political opponent in the most public manner possible.

See how ruthlessly Kotek used her power as speaker to process the gerrymander issue. Kotek has removed the word "compromise" from her spoken vocabulary.

I must assume Kotek considers readers of newspapers with opinions different from hers to be clueless, when she makes public statements like "... I've realized

we can only 'get things done' if we work together ..."

I am grateful that state Sen. Betsy Johnson has decided to run for governor of Oregon as an independent rather than as a Democrat.

Johnson understands multiple points of view. More importantly, she understands compromise, and seeks mutual ground for all points of view.

If politicians continue to choose super-partisanship over reasonable discussion and compromise, democracy will continue to degenerate into open confrontation with ill will for all, and to all a good night.

SCOTT WIDDICOMBE  
Warrenton