

OPINION

theAstorian

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WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

Playing among friends

Among friends, there’s a feeling of being at ease. Comfortable. A willingness to try new things. That is part of what the Liberty Theatre’s Third Dimension Festival accomplished.

Helmed by Sergey Antonov and Jennifer Crockett, the theater’s executive director, the Russian cellist is as at home with Astoria as the city is with him.

After years of concerts, Antonov’s own festival is just getting started.

But the 11-night festival, now in its second year, is already something: an inspiring model of musical communication and understanding.

Take Sunday’s concert, for instance.

A Brahms quintet for clarinet, violins, viola and cello showed each player’s use of nonverbal cues: a nod, glance, sniff or shoulder lift.

The piece, featuring Antonov, Crockett on clarinet, violinists Solomiya Ivakhiv and Misha Keylin and violist Mark Berger, was beautiful.

Its success in showcasing the talents of Crockett and Ivakhiv is due in no small part to the group’s cohesiveness as a living, breathing communicative unit.

Even the festival’s title focuses its mission: to have human interactions in a three-dimensional setting.

What was most meaningful in Sunday’s concert were the personal touches.

The concert opened with a piano quintet world premiere by Asiya Korepanova that was both gentle and powerful.

With Korepanova at the piano, her passion was palpable. It was clearly felt



Jonathan Williams/The Astorian

Performers in Sunday’s closing night concert of the Third Dimension Festival at the Liberty Theatre.

by Antonov, Ivakhiv, Keylin and Berger.

The multilayered piece was intense. A thundering solo piano run filled the Liberty. A striking bit from the strings near the end sounded like a machine firing up as each player performed the same rhythm one after the other.

The intensity matched the mood. Korepanova’s piece was based off a Ukrainian song, especially resonant as the war with Russia continues. Antonov and others in the group, who have friends and family in Russia and Ukraine, had denounced Russian President Vladimir Putin’s war on Ukraine leading up to the festival.

The evening capped off with Dvorak’s quintet for piano, violins, viola and cello. The dreamlike piece offered strong unisons, balance, and, my personal favorite — more viola.

It offered yet another example of the power and beauty of hearing contributions from diverse voices.

On piano this time was Ilya Kazantsev, who with Antonov and Keylin make up the Hermitage Piano Trio. Kazantsev’s clear, swift nods for Crockett to turn the page for him were as intriguing to watch as it was to hear the music.

It is in this vein of understanding one another this festival most succeeds.

In a masterclass given in June as

part of the festival, Antonov, Crockett, Kazantsev, Ivakhiv and Berger each took part in giving feedback to local twin sisters who play alto saxophone and flute in Astoria schools.

Though they could have spent the time finessing the music, equal time was given to focus on communication and musicianship.

While the girls played, Crockett, Antonov and the others would stop the players to give feedback: the importance of being close to the accompanist and communicating with them through nods, sniffs and shoulder raises; breathing; showing when a note is coming; owning the music; and telling a flowing story though the piece.

Antonov noted how notes are musicians’ words and how understanding each other without words is the best feeling.

The concert was like watching coaches on a pool deck, batting cage or field critique an athlete. Like sports, music requires discipline, and it too makes stronger, more cognizant people aware of others’ energy and how to respond to it, as was displayed here. The reward for the girls was the payoff: Both sounded stronger and played more confidently by the end of each workshop.

A number of people in the small audience in between performances and

afterward could be heard saying how brave each girl was. And they were. It takes courage to play for an audience and be critiqued.

And while it was disappointing the first Astoria International Chamber Music Competition for young musicians was canceled this year, this workshop offered a taste of what could come in following years.

One of the things I’ll always remember from my days playing viola in a local symphony on the North Coast was the importance of looking ahead in your music. We would draw little eyeglasses indicating a need to look ahead for a trouble spot, complicated passage or critical section. I still use this method today even outside of music.

In that spirit, we should expect to look forward to more festivals like this one. Possible additions could include more youth involvement with local schools and outdoor concerts.

Like friends who only meet once a year, there is joy in knowing we can continue expecting more music from Antonov and his friends when they return.

The lessons in nimbleness, verve and energy from this year’s festival are just what the North Coast needs.

Jonathan Williams is the associate editor of The Astorian.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Blessed

When I lived in northern Virginia, I was blessed with the opportunity to usher at the Kennedy Center Concert Hall for 15 years. I heard wonderful orchestras, soloists and virtuosos.

Last month in Astoria, I was blessed to hear music that matched anything I heard in Washington, D.C. the Hermitage Piano Trio, and the other artists brought in for the Third Dimension Festival, are incredible musicians.

The fact that they return to our small community every year is a credit to the Liberty Theatre, and to Bill and Deb Armington, who first brought them here.

I am elated that they are returning next year. I hope that every Astorian will plan to attend at least one of their performances. Even if you’re not a classical music fan, I promise that their virtuosity will astound you, and their passion will move you.

If you want to ensure that this wonderful relationship continues into the future, please consider sponsoring one of their performances next year. The Liberty Theatre website has contact information. I can hardly wait for next year’s concerts!

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Astoria

True colors

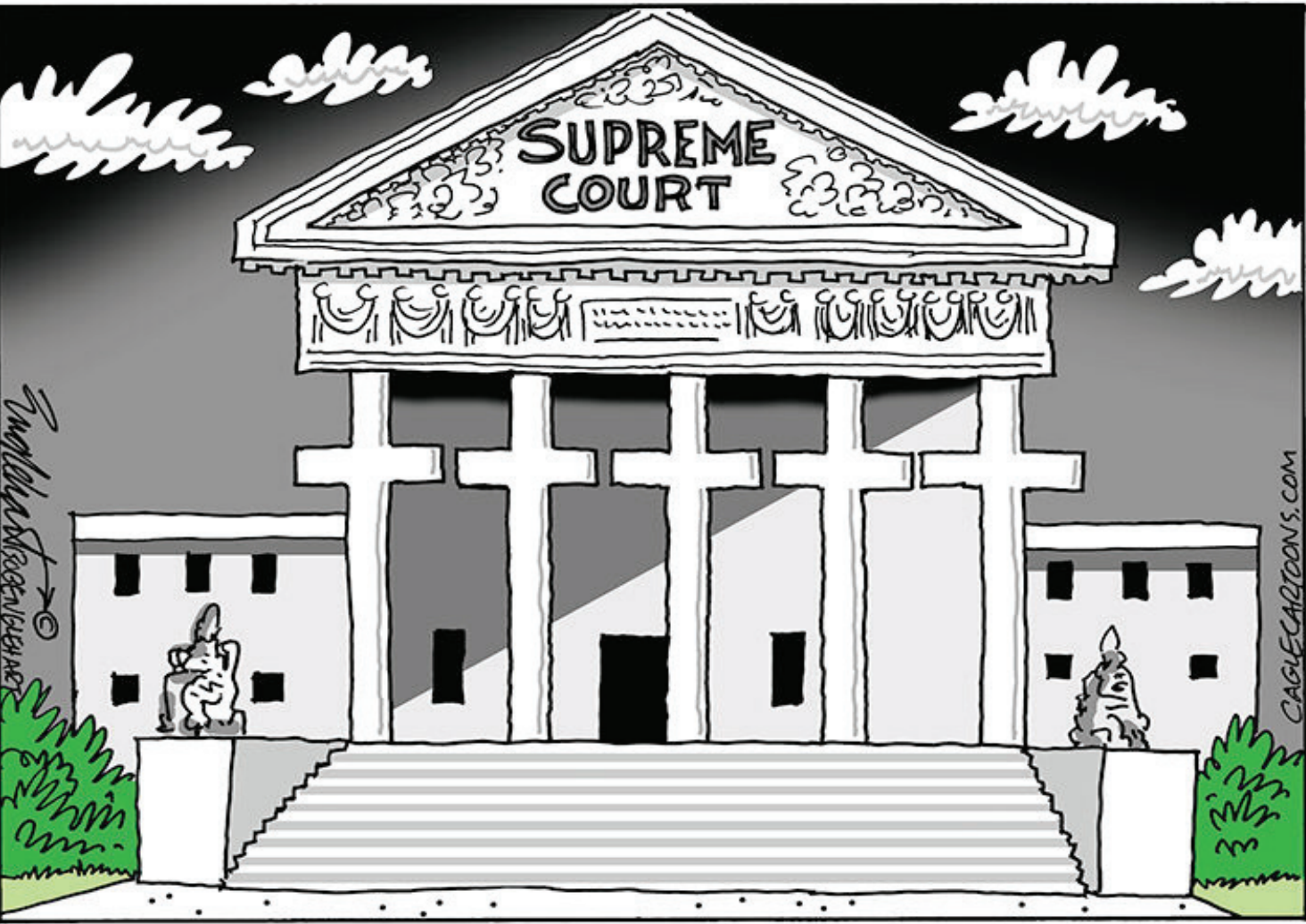
‘Sex before marriage? Not in my book!’ said Noah Webster.

Probably apocryphal, but pretty much the expectation, if not the reality before the “sexual revolution” which supposedly occurred in the 1960s. People differ in their interpretation of those tumultuous times, but one thing was for sure — there were a lot more shotgun marriages and girls disappearing from high school, never to return or to finish their education, when I was a teenager.

Now, the ayatollahs at the Supreme Court are showing their true colors — their goal is an Iranian-style theocracy in which they are the true and only messengers of the divine presence that controls the universe.

But of course, their divine presence is somehow different from the Iranian divine presence or perhaps the Hindu divine presence — so we can count on a return to the medieval Crusades. How discouraging.

More to the point — in all the fulmi-



LETTERS WELCOME

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nation about “abortion” there hasn’t been a word uttered about male responsibility! Are these all virgin births? If abortion is to be outlawed, there needs to be some accountability for the males — this can’t be all on the women.

Webster’s dictionary also has “freedom” before “responsibility.” In 250 words, I can only conclude that life is more complicated than either a dictionary

or a Supreme Court decision can embrace.
THOMAS DUNCAN
Astoria

Slide

The end of Roe v. Wade has a lot of Americans feeling that they are waking up in a nation that has suddenly taken

a giant leap backwards. I “feel” that way myself — devastated, furious — but when I look at it rationally, against the backdrop of other U.S. inequities, I see just the continuation of a multidecade slide to the right, with its continued commodification of human liberties.

The right to abortion isn’t being ended in the U.S., it is being further commodified, just like health care, housing, clean air and water, workers’ rights, security, education, legal representation, speech, drug use and far more. The truth is many of those decrying the end of Roe have been mute, or even helped commodify other liberties, and some of these people are the biggest names in the Democratic Party.

I am reminded of Martin Niemöller’s poem, “First they came,” but here in the U.S., the lines are still being written, for many who are at each others’ throats have yet to realize they are in the same camp. If you’re new in this camp, just ask someone who’s been here for decades, what it’s like.

MICHAEL A. “SASHA” MILLER
Salem