

Eine Kleine Summer Music: 30th Anniversary

MOLLIE KAYE

The June concert series celebrates the natural power and intimacy of chamber music.

I have vivid memories of my cellist father hosting some of the other local symphony musicians to play chamber music in our home. During the summer, I would be allowed to stay up and listen, perched at the top of the stairs in my pyjamas. Nothing about those evenings was sedate; there was no chance of me falling asleep as they played. My recollections are of raucously dynamic music-making—quiet passages and sudden, impassioned chords flying from the strings, percussive flourishes ringing out from the piano, all of it punctuated now and then by booming cascades of adult conversation and laughter. Every molecule of the drywall and furniture seemed to be reverberating; it felt as if the house might explode.

The energy and intimacy of those evenings, and the power of that music, was a privilege to know. While grand orchestral works played in large halls certainly yield magnificent experiences, there is something precious that gets lost. For each instrument in the orchestra is a powerhouse unto itself. It's easy to lose sight of this when eight violins, six violas and five cellos are on stage, all blending into one sound.

When one player performs each part in a smaller venue, it's astounding how much volume and richness reverberates through the air. There is a visceral connection one feels to the music and the musician. It is a pleasure to hear the individual instrumentalist's style, timbre and phrasing, each one of their notes in the co-created texture easily identifiable, yet supporting the whole.

This is the essence of chamber music. Victoria concert pianist Lorraine Min is passionate about sharing it with other musicians—and small, fortunate local audiences. She is co-artistic director of the Eine Kleine Summer Music festival (EKSM), a delicious, *petit-four* miniature of a music series that takes place each year in the verdant splendour of West Saanich, and typically sells out.

The 30th anniversary season of the EKSM sounds like it won't disappoint. It kicks off with an afternoon performance at the Unitarian Church on June 4. One of Canada's brightest young stars, concert pianist Jan Lisiecki, was previously featured in a Victoria Symphony concert, and this will be his first time playing a solo recital here.

There will be some well-known Bach on the menu, as well as some familiar Chopin and Schubert, but also a little-known Schumann



The Muse Ensemble (l-r): Terence Tam, Laura Backstrom, Lorraine Min, Kenji Fuse

piece which, says Min, was written later in the composer's life. "As a pianist and performer, I find the warmth of [Schumann's] spirit incredible," says Min. "He wasn't just looking to further his own music and career. He wanted to celebrate and encourage other musicians around him." Whether Min is conscious of it or not, she clearly is engaged in the same mission.

Now in her third year of being co-artistic director of the Eine Kleine Summer Music festival, Min says the festival began with a Victoria couple whose daughter played the cello. "They wanted her to have good musicians to perform with, so they started to present concerts with more professional musicians in town, who played in the symphony or at UVic. They wanted her to have that wonderful experience... They valued and cherished the idea of chamber music, and the ambience that goes along with it, to have it be in an intimate setting, in the country... that's what makes Eine Kleine so unique."

The popular series of concerts take place in two small venues "outside the hustle and bustle of the city," explains Min. They are indoor events, but, she says, "You see rolling meadows, trees, flowers, the beauty of nature... that was very important, and that has remained a tradition with this festival." The First Unitarian Church, she says, "has lots of windows and natural light" and offers scenic views of the countryside.



Lorraine Min

“IT REALLY DOES NEED TO BE in an environment where there is silence, so everyone can feel the music come to life that way.”—Lorraine Min

While the concerts at both the Church and at a new venue—Church and State Winery—are not “lawn-chair and picnic blanket with animals and babies running around” concerts, Min says the modicum of formality indoors offers an enhancement to the intimate and powerful experience. The silence, she says, “allows for that wonderful dynamic range, where you can play very soft, like a whisper, or have silence, which is powerful, palpable—then play big, and with body. It really does need to be in an environment where there is silence, so everyone can feel the music come to life that way.”

Chamber music, Min says, is “so very different from playing in a larger ensemble. Each instrument has its own individual voice, and they are all interconnected together...there is something really magical about that.” She adds that playing music “with colleagues you admire and work well with on a personal level elevates the music as well. Something that we treasure and do our best to maintain at [Eine Kleine] is that feeling...that can only exist with this small group of you on stage together.”

On June 11 and 12 the program will feature the EKSM debut of dual instrumentalist Barry Schiffman. “He is an equally beautiful violinist and violist,” Min enthuses, and the repertoire chosen will feature him playing both. The concerts will also feature founding Lafayette String Quartet cellist Pamela Highbaugh Aloni, Min on piano, Terence Tam and Julian Vitek on violin, Kenji Fuse on viola, and Laura Backstrom on cello.

The Muse Ensemble takes centre stage for the third presentation of the series on June 18 and 19. Tam, Backstrom, Fuse and Min comprise the quartet. Min says The Muse will bring an extra element of celebration during this 30th anniversary series. “We are excited to perform the program that is going to be on our upcoming CD; we will have our CD launch during that weekend.”

The fourth and final concert on June 25 and 26 features Suzanne Lemieux, principal oboe of the Symphony of Nova Scotia. Min says the program will feature a contemporary virtuoso piece that features not just show-off moments for the piano, which, she says, is “typically the case—it’s not unusual to hear a pianist having to play very technically challenging and dazzling music, but to hear an oboist do the same is quite remarkable. This piece is extremely virtuosic and challenging.” The Bach double concerto for violin and oboe will close the EKSM, the symmetry of which pleases Min. “We begin the season with Bach, and we end the season with Bach.”

Eine Kleine Summer Music concert series, June 4, 11, 12, 18, 19, 25 and 26. Tickets, \$25-\$110. Order form available at eksm.ca, or call 250-413-3134. You can also order online at eventbrite.ca.



Writer Mollie Kaye performs with The Millies, a Victoria-based vocal trio.



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