

Victoria-born violinist comes home to play



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Classical Music
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IN CONCERT

What: Eine Kleine Summer Music
When/where: June 17 and 24, July 1, 2:30 p.m., First Unitarian Church (5575 West Saanich Rd.); June 18 and 25, July 2, 7 p.m., Church & State Wines (1445 Benvenuto Ave., Brentwood Bay)
Tickets: First Unitarian \$30, seniors and students \$25; Church & State, \$35. Call 250-413-3134; online at eventbrite.ca; in person at Raincoast Business Centre (1027 Pandora Ave.).
Details: eksm.ca

The 31st season of Eine Kleine Summer Music, the annual series of intimate and relaxed chamber-music concerts, began on June 10 with the local debut of the Ariel String Quartet, an Israeli ensemble.

That concert had already sold out in May, but fortunately the three remaining programs are all being offered twice, first on Sunday afternoons at First Unitarian Church, the series' main venue in the Saanich countryside, then the following evening at Church & State Wines.

EKSM began outgrowing First Unitarian long ago, and the repeat performances that have been given at Peninsula wineries in recent seasons have taken some of the pressure off in terms of ticket sales. Nevertheless, the series remains popular enough that one more of this season's concerts (June 18) has already sold out and few tickets remain for the others.

The forthcoming concerts will feature, as usual, a mixture of standard and off-the-beaten-track repertoire, performed by some of the best local musicians and distinguished visitors.

The core performers remain those of the Muse Ensemble, which comprises EKSM's artistic directors, cellist Laura Backstrom and pianist Lorraine Min, plus two members of the Victoria Symphony: its concertmaster, Terence Tam, and its principal violinist, Kenji Fuse.

On June 17 and 18, EKSM will welcome back a favourite guest, violinist Nikki Chooi, who was born here, but has developed a major international reputation over the past decade. "It's been five years since we had Nikki Chooi on the program, and I can hardly wait," Backstrom says. "He's a powerhouse — amazing to play with."

In the first half of the program, Chooi and Min will perform César Franck's *Violin Sonata* (1886) and one of the six sonatas for unaccompanied violin composed in 1924 by the great

Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe.

The second half, at Chooi's suggestion, will be devoted to Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence* (1890), a big, lush string sextet that was his last work of chamber music. Chooi, Fuse and Backstrom will be joined by violinist Simon MacDonald, violist Jessica Pickersgill and cellist Joyce Ellwood.

On June 24 and 25, the Muse Ensemble will collaborate with bassist Bruce Meikle in an intriguing rarity: the Piano Quintet in A Minor, Op. 30, by French composer Louise Farrenc (1804-75).

Farrenc composed a significant body of chamber music, many piano pieces, two overtures and three symphonies. She was also an influential professor at the Paris Conservatoire for more than 30 years and was a scholar who did pioneering work in early keyboard music.

Her Op. 30 is an ambitious, ardently Romantic work in four movements, running about half an hour. Published in 1842, it was the first of two quintets she wrote for the same combination of instruments (obviously inspired by Schubert's "Trout" Quintet), and it was these works that established her reputation.

The Muse Ensemble's program also includes Brahms's Violin Sonata No. 2 in A Major and Beethoven's piano-quartet arrangement of his Op. 16, a quintet for piano and wind instruments from 1796.

(EKSM has brought to light many interesting specimens of the piano-quartet and piano-quintet literatures over the years.)

Finally, on July 1 and 2, EKSM will sponsor the local debut of an eclectic young American ensemble, the JCT Trio, comprising violinist Stefan Jackiw, cellist Jay Campbell and pianist Conrad Tao, who is also a composer. ("JCT" stands for "Junction.") The trio is stopping here on its way to the venerable Aspen Music Festival in Colorado.

Its program is mostly given over to major piano trios by Ravel and Charles Ives, the former Classical in profile, the latter wilfully idiosyncratic and ostentatiously modernistic (though it predates the First World War).

The outer movements of the Ives trio are elegiac, the middle movement dense, busy and wild, stuffed with (sometimes grotesquely distorted) quotations from folk songs, popular tunes and college songs from his days at Yale. Ives labelled this movement "Tsiaj," meaning "This scherzo is a joke." (You can watch the JCT Trio perform it on YouTube.)

This program also includes *Passing Through, Staying Put* (2011), a short piano trio by Christopher Trapani, an adventurous, award-winning composer from New Orleans whose music synthesizes a huge range of disparate musical and literary influences.