



Cape Cod Chamber Music Festival aims for unusual

By Keith Powers / Contributing Writer

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A deer-bone flute?

You always get lots of variety at a chamber music festival. But you rarely hear a Mass.

“Especially not a Mass that sounds like an opera,” Jon Nakamatsu says.

The co-artistic director of the Cape Cod Chamber Music Festival – a post he has shared with clarinetist Jon Manasse for 11 seasons – is talking about Rossini’s “Petite Messe Solennelle,” one of the many highlights of this year’s Aug. 1-25 festival.

“The Rossini Mass is a funny thing,” Nakamatsu says. “It usually gets these huge productions, but it’s actually scored to be played in a living room. It’s really the most chamber-music work he ever wrote. And even though it follows the traditional Mass cycle, it’s an opera. Absolutely an opera.”

Of course, it’s not all opera in this 38th version of the festival. The music begins Aug. 1, with the Mile-End Trio performing music of Beethoven, Brahms and Schoenfield at the Cotuit Center for the Arts.

In the succeeding three weeks, the festival will host the Emerson, Lydian, Borromeo and Ying string quartets; will give a world premiere for deer-bone flute – pretty sure nobody has heard this instrument before; and visit great chamber works of Mozart, Mendelssohn and Brahms.

“The festival is fantastic and keeps getting better every year,” Nakamatsu says. “We have really been getting the word out, and, this year, we have more pre-season ticket sales than ever. And last year was our record year.”

“Most festivals are not like this model,” he says, referring to the fact that Cape Cod festival performs in five different venues, from Wellfleet to Cotuit. “We can get a lot of different audiences. I think all of our audiences are open, especially to new things. We’re not giving them candy all the time.

“Even with our most conservative audiences, we can put something new on the program, expose them to it, and they usually enjoy it. It’s really in the art of programming.”

One program this year has something new and decidedly old at the same time. The return of festival favorites the Borromeo String Quartet on Aug. 15-16 has the foursome joining up with flutist and scholar Jelle Atema, who will premiere a work written for them by Julian Lampert.

That’s the new part. The old part is the flute, which is Atema’s re-creation of an ancient instrument, originally carved from deer or bear bone. We do mean old – Cro-Magnon old, in the neighborhood of 40,000 years ago.

Lampert has written a quintet for Borromeo and Atema, who will play both his ancient re-creation and a modern flute in the performance. That program takes the stage first in Cotuit on Aug. 15, and then repeats the following evening at the Dennis Union Church.

Another festival highlight will be the Ying Quartet residency during the final week of performances. The Ying Quartet follows residencies in previous years by the Jupiter and Escher quartets. “These concerts end up being some of the best-selling,” Nakamatsu says. “It’s a change for the group to play in different configurations, and for the people to get to know them better.”

Ying performs three major works in its Aug. 21 program in Orleans – quartet settings by Borodin, Stravinsky and Beethoven – then joins with soprano Ilana Davidson for Schubert songs on Aug. 23 in Chatham. The quartet closes the residency and the festival with Manasse and Nakamatsu, performing two Brahms quintets, in Wellfleet on Aug. 25.

“For audiences, this is a way to see the flexibility of an ensemble,” Nakamatsu says, “and it’s a great pleasure for me to perform with them.”

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