

Pianist Natalie Zhu helms 9th Kingston Chamber Music Festival

By Keith Powers / Special to The Journal

Posted Jul 13, 2017 at 9:00 PM

Updated Jul 14, 2017 at 1:04 PM

Kingston Chamber Music Festival kicks off its 29th season, with Natalie Zhu again at the helm.

Now in her ninth season as artistic director of the Kingston Chamber Music Festival, pianist Natalie Zhu has learned a lot.

Not about the “playing music” part. Of course, that continues to happen.

The other part.

“Before I came here I performed a lot, and I used to teach a bit. But this is something very different,” Zhu says, of running a festival. “It’s not just music. It’s how you get to know people, and so many things on the business side — necessary things. We musicians don’t realize it.”

The Kingston festival opens its 29th season — Zhu took over from founder David Kim in 2009 — on July 19, starting a week of chamber performances, mostly at the University of Rhode Island’s Fine Arts Center concert hall.

Besides Zhu herself, this year’s roster of musicians includes violinists Martin Beaver, Juliette Kang, Jasmine Lin and Zachary DePue; violists Che-Hung Chen and Anna-Marie Petersen; oboist James Austin Smith; and cellists Wilhelmina Smith and Priscilla Lee.

Project Fusion, a saxophone quartet, joins in for two programs, and pianist Hanchien Lee gives a solo performance in the one run-out concert, at the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Kingston, July 22.

The repertory runs from standard to obscure to wildly adventurous.

“This year the programming was all me,” Zhu says, “but usually I’ll take a suggestion or two from the audience. It’s a balance between what musicians are coming, and what they do, and what the audience suggests.”



“I do try to focus on chamber music,” she says, “and even though I’m not trying to dig up pieces, I do find stuff that I’ve never heard, like the Amy Beach quintet we’re playing this year.”

That piece, on the July 23 concert along with Paul Schoenfield’s “Café Music,” is one of those bracingly beautiful works that has fallen through the musical cracks, and hardly ever gets programmed.

“Our audience still likes the classical repertoire, but I like to think that we can stretch out to pieces they’ve never heard before once in a while,” Zhu says.

Zhu contributes to several programs, and pianist Viktor Valkov does as well, including a performance of Ravel’s “Gaspard de la Nuit” on July 26. But the pianistic spotlight falls on Hanchien Lee, whose solo recital includes two major works, Beethoven’s first piano sonata, and Schumann’s “Faschingsschwank aus Wien,” as well as Chiayu’s “Rhapsody Toccata.”

“I met Hanchien when she was 10,” Zhu says. “She was a Curtis, a real prodigy. Now she’s graduated from Curtis, and Yale, and gotten a doctorate from Peabody.”

“We usually invite one young pianist to join us — there are so many out there, and they deserve the exposure, the chance to play a recital. She’s going to join in our outreach programs as well.”

Audiences each summer have been robust. Noting that the festival has almost 200 subscribers for this season, general manager Brian Mitchell says, “it’s a very loyal fan base. Like everywhere else, programming and artists drive ticket sales. Our atmosphere is casual, with lots of socializing before the concerts. But everyone gets quiet and attentive after the music begins.”

Zhu, who just returned from a tour of China with the Philadelphia Orchestra and maestro Yannick Nézet-Séguin, as a last-minute fill-in — “I had to learn ‘Petrouchka’ in one week, and had 20 minutes of rehearsal with Yannick,” she says — sees lots of highlights in this summer’s festival.

“One exciting thing is the return of the saxophone quartet,” she says of Project Fusion, who sit in July 29 and help close the festival the next afternoon. “They came last summer, and audiences thought it was great. And this year we’re doing the Piazzolla ‘Four Seasons,’ and they’re also doing a one-week residency in the schools as part of their visit.”

The Kingston Chamber Music Festival runs July 19-30 at the URI Fine Arts Center, Upper College Road, Kingston. The July 22 concert is at Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, 383 Old North Rd., Kingston. Tickets are \$25 (\$30 for the church concert). Call (401) 874-2106 or go to kingstonchambermusic.org.

— Keith Powers covers music and the arts for the GateHouse papers and WBUR’s The ARTery. On Twitter at [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith).

If you go ...

What: Kingston Chamber Music Festival

When: July 19-30

Where: URI Fine Arts Center, Upper College Road, Kingston (July 22 at Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, 383 Old North Rd., Kingston)

Tickets: \$25 (\$30 on July 30)

Information: (401) 874-2106, kingstonchambermusic.org

READ NEXT

Pianist Natalie Zhu helms 9th Kingston Chamber Music Festival

By Keith Powers / Special to The Journal

Posted Jul 13, 2017 at 9:00 PM

Updated Jul 14, 2017 at 1:04 PM

Kingston Chamber Music Festival kicks off its 29th season, with Natalie Zhu again at the helm.

Now in her ninth season as artistic director of the Kingston Chamber Music Festival, pianist Natalie Zhu has learned a lot.

Not about the “playing music” part. Of course, that continues to happen.

The other part.

“Before I came here I performed a lot, and I used to teach a bit. But this is something very different,” Zhu says, of running a festival. “It’s not just music. It’s how you get to know people, and so many things on the business side — necessary things. We musicians don’t realize it.”

The Kingston festival opens its 29th season — Zhu took over from founder David Kim in 2009 — on July 19, starting a week of chamber performances, mostly at the University of Rhode Island’s Fine Arts Center concert hall.

Besides Zhu herself, this year’s roster of musicians includes violinists Martin Beaver, Juliette Kang, Jasmine Lin and Zachary DePue; violists Che-Hung Chen and Anna-Marie Petersen; oboist James Austin Smith; and cellists Wilhelmina Smith and Priscilla Lee.

Project Fusion, a saxophone quartet, joins in for two programs, and pianist Hanchien Lee gives a solo performance in the one run-out concert, at the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Kingston, July 22.

The repertory runs from standard to obscure to wildly adventurous.

“This year the programming was all me,” Zhu says, “but usually I’ll take a suggestion or two from the audience. It’s a balance between what musicians are coming, and what they do, and what the audience suggests.

“I do try to focus on chamber music,” she says, “and even though I’m not trying to dig up pieces, I do find stuff that I’ve never heard, like the Amy Beach quintet we’re playing this year.”

That piece, on the July 23 concert along with Paul Schoenfield’s “Café Music,” is one of those bracingly beautiful works that has fallen through the musical cracks, and hardly ever gets programmed.



“Our audience still likes the classical repertoire, but I like to think that we can stretch out to pieces they’ve never heard before once in a while,” Zhu says.

Zhu contributes to several programs, and pianist Viktor Valkov does as well, including a performance of Ravel’s “Gaspard de la Nuit” on July 26. But the pianistic spotlight falls on Hanchien Lee, whose solo recital includes two major works, Beethoven’s first piano sonata, and Schumann’s “Faschingsschwank aus Wien,” as well as Chiayu’s “Rhapsody Toccata.”

“I met Hanchien when she was 10,” Zhu says. “She was a Curtis, a real prodigy. Now she’s graduated from Curtis, and Yale, and gotten a doctorate from Peabody.

“We usually invite one young pianist to join us — there are so many out there, and they deserve the exposure, the chance to play a recital. She’s going to join in our outreach programs as well.”

Audiences each summer have been robust. Noting that the festival has almost 200 subscribers for this season, general manager Brian Mitchell says, “it’s a very loyal fan base. Like everywhere else, programming and artists drive ticket sales. Our atmosphere is casual, with lots of socializing before the concerts. But everyone gets quiet and attentive after the music begins.”

Zhu, who just returned from a tour of China with the Philadelphia Orchestra and maestro Yannick Nézet-Séguin, as a last-minute fill-in — “I had to learn ‘Petrouchka’ in one week, and had 20 minutes of rehearsal with Yannick,” she says — sees lots of highlights in this summer’s festival.

“One exciting thing is the return of the saxophone quartet,” she says of Project Fusion, who sit in July 29 and help close the festival the next afternoon. “They came last summer, and audiences thought it was great. And this year we’re doing the Piazzolla ‘Four Seasons,’ and they’re also doing a one-week residency in the schools as part of their visit.”

The Kingston Chamber Music Festival runs July 19-30 at the URI Fine Arts Center, Upper College Road, Kingston. The July 22 concert is at Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, 383 Old North Rd., Kingston. Tickets are \$25 (\$30 for the church concert). Call (401) 874-2106 or go to kingstonchambermusic.org.

— Keith Powers covers music and the arts for the GateHouse papers and WBUR’s The ARTery. On Twitter at [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith).

If you go ...

What: Kingston Chamber Music Festival

When: July 19-30

Where: URI Fine Arts Center, Upper College Road, Kingston (July 22 at Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, 383 Old North Rd., Kingston)

Tickets: \$25 (\$30 on July 30)

Information: (401) 874-2106, kingstonchambermusic.org