

ROCKPOR...

By Keith Powers / Correspondent

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When you go to a concert, you probably think you're coming to hear the musicians. But maybe they're coming to be with you. "We have amazing artists in the Boston area," says Chameleon Arts Ensemble's artistic director Deborah Boldin. "But we have the best audience. They love music, and discovering new music. It's incredible. "You can't play music well without having engaged listeners," she says. "What makes the performance itself is that combined energy. You can feel it in both directions."

If you go...

WHAT: Chameleon Arts Ensemble, at Rockport Chamber Music Festival

WHERE: Shalin Liu Performance Center, 37 Main St., Rockport

WHEN: Sunday, June 18, 5 p.m.

TICKETS: \$35-\$49. Visit www.rockportmusic.org or call 978-546-7391.

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“You can’t play music well without having engaged listeners,” she says. “What makes the performance itself is that combined energy. You can feel it in both directions.”

Boston-based Chameleon returns for its second consecutive Father’s Day appearance at the Rockport Chamber Music Festival this Sunday. Popular for their unusual programs and fluid line-up of collaborators, Chameleon will celebrate its 20th anniversary this upcoming season.

“I call it the neglected corners of the repertoire,” Boldin says of the group’s programming. “We’ve stuck to our principals.

“It’s a little hard to believe it’s been 20 years,” she says. “We started out with a five-concert season, and this year we had 19 concerts, with two performances of each program. And a music education program that’s got five concerts, and 20 workshops.

“It’s been 20 years, but we’ll always feel like the new kids on the block.”

The RCMF program present a microcosm of what Chameleon is all about. Beethoven’s variations on “Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen,” for cello (Rafael Popper-Keizer) and piano (Vivian Choi), or Bartok’s “Contrasts” — these are works chamber music fans might recognize.

But Berio’s “Folk Songs” for soprano (Mary Mackenzie) and ensemble, or Bloch’s first piano quintet — these works epitomize the “neglected corners of the repertoire” that Boldin refers to.

Berio wrote this set of songs for his wife, the virtuoso mezzo Cathy Berberian. They are an amalgam of folk songs, found music and Berio’s original compositions, and present an alternative side to the composer’s work.

He’s often known as thorny, closely linked to the electronic experiments of the mid-20th century; these songs show Berio working to present more straightforward texts. He loved voice, and in Berberian had a brilliant partner and interpretive artist to work with.

“They date from 1964,” Boldin says. “The instruments are used to provide context for the songs. Some are traditional — like ‘Black is the Colour’ — but he composed two of the middle songs himself. He reinterpreted work from anthologies, even from old records.”

The Bloch quintet, which fills the second half of the program, truly has been neglected. “It’s fantastic,” Boldin says. “The sound-world has a mix of later Romantic, with muscular Bartok, and a little Debussy thrown in too.

“It can be wild — quarter tone intervals, lots of fancy string techniques like bowing over the fingerboard. But Bloch insisted that he wasn’t trying to create any new system. It’s almost symphonic in scale, with the amount of sound that comes out.”

Week three at RCMF begins with an all-Brahms program on Thursday evening, featuring pianist Andrew Rangell, an appearance by the Escher Quartet with pianist Joyce Yang on Friday, and a concert presentation of Purcell’s “The Fairy Queen” by the Handel & Haydn Society on Saturday evening. For complete information and tickets call 978-546-7391 or visit www.rockportmusic.org.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR’s ARTery. Follow [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith); email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com

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