

“What we play is life.” ■ LOUIS ARMSTRONG

FESTIVAL NOTES

THE KINGSTON CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL NEWSLETTER ■ NATALIE ZHU, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

SPRING 2024

THE SPIRIT OF KINGSTON

OUR 36TH SEASON ■ SIX CONCERTS ■ JULY 24-AUGUST 4

Since 1989, the Kingston Chamber Music Festival (KCMF) has delivered extraordinary chamber music on the beautiful University of Rhode Island campus. Our 36th season, six concerts held July 24 through August 4 in Edwards Hall, will be a celebration of what makes KCMF unique for performers and concert goers alike.

“We challenge musicians,” says Artistic Director Natalie Zhu of how she’d characterize the spirit of KCMF. “Not only are many of them playing together for the first time, they are learning repertoire they have never played before. They thrive on the energy and excitement of the environment, and it fuels their creativity and productivity. They inhale fresh air every time in Kingston!” As internationally acclaimed musicians gather to infuse their incredible skill and passion into a wide range of repertoire — from fresh takes on classic pieces to new works by living composers — the audience experiences one-of-a-kind musical performances.

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PERFORMING AT THE FESTIVAL: TOP, FROM LEFT ► NATALIE ZHU, PIANO, BY JOIE ELIE PHOTOGRAPHY; **DOVER QUARTET:** JOEL LINK, VIOLIN, JULIANNE LEE, VIOLA, CAMDEN SHAW, CELLO, AND BRYAN LEE, VIOLIN, BY ROY COX; JENNIFER GRIM, FLUTE, BY TRACEY HAGEN; DAVID KIM, VIOLIN, BY ALLIE SKYLAR; PITNARRY SHIN, CELLO. **MIDDLE, FROM LEFT** ► NOAH GELLER, VIOLIN; ALEXANDROV-SKLIAR DUO: ALEXEY ALEXANDROV, DOMRA, AND EKATERINA SKLIAR, MANDOLIN; JULIETTE KANG, VIOLIN, BY KATHRYN RAINES; BURCHARD TANG, VIOLA, BY SETH JACOBSON. **BOTTOM, FROM LEFT** ► CLANCY NEWMAN, CELLO, BY LISA-MARIE MAZZUCCO; PRISCILLA LEE, CELLO, BY ALLISON DAY; **DUO MANTAR:** ADAM LEVIN, GUITAR, AND JACOB REUVEN, MANDOLIN, BY BOGDAN URMA PHOTOGRAPHY; HENRY KRAMER, PIANO, BY GRITTANI CREATIVE LTD; CHE-HUNG CHEN, VIOLA, BY JOIE ELIE PHOTOGRAPHY; KYU-YOUNG KIM, VIOLIN, BY DAVID FINLAYSON PHOTOGRAPHY; IAN LIN, PIANO, BY CHRISTINE LIU.

NAMEPLATE PHOTO BY PETER GOLDBERG

THE SPIRIT OF KINGSTON: OUR 36TH SEASON CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

I NEW FACES

The festival will kick off on July 24 with Aaron Jay Kernis' evocative *Air for Flute and String Quartet*, the perfect showcase for the "seemingly boundless talent" (Jon Sobel, *BlogCritics*) of flutist Jennifer Grim, who is making her KCMF debut. Other newcomers include Alexey Alexandrov and Ekaterina Skliar, a husband-and-wife team who tour as the Alexandrov-Skliar Duo and play the domra and mandolin respectively; Adam Levin, a classical guitarist, and Jacob Reuven, a mandolinist, who perform together as Duo Mantar; Henry Kramer, a pianist celebrated for his "thrilling and triumphant" performances (*The New York Times*); and cellist Pitnarry Shin, who has been praised in *Strad* magazine for her passionate interpretations.

I REVEL IN BELOVED CLASSICS

From Frédéric Chopin's Cello Sonata in G-minor to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Piano Quartet in E-flat Major, the programming throughout the six concerts offers rich masterpieces of the chamber music repertoire. "Each piece is filled with beautiful melodies that are passed between the instruments, drawing the listener in with its emotional depth," Zhu says of these works. "They remind me that the beauty in life is all around us, waiting to be discovered and appreciated."

I DISCOVER NEW COMPOSERS

Among other highlights, Grim and Kramer will play Valerie Coleman's *Wish: Sonatine for Flute and Piano*. Coleman, who was named Performance Today's 2020 Classical Woman of the Year, wrote this impactful piece remembering the Middle Passage, in which people from Africa were trafficked across the Atlantic to be sold into slavery. The piece is notable for an abundance of moments that allow both flute and piano to interpret rhythm and melody, encouraging musicians to slightly relax standard classical phrasings in favor of an organic interpretation.

I THE SPIRIT OF JAZZ

On Friday, July 26, enjoy a variety of pieces that reveal the influence of jazz on early 20th-century classical composition. From the rich and dynamic *Night Sky* by Dana Suesse (once nicknamed "The Girl Gershwin" by *The New Yorker*) to Charlie Parker's *Billie's Bounce* (a jazz composition arranged for domra and mandolin by the Alexandrov-Skliar Duo, who will perform it) to Paul Schoenfeld's lively *Cafe Music for Violin, Cello and Piano*, these works will prove to be irresistible when delivered with the dynamic talent of an impressive group of artists.

I THE SPIRIT OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

While the pairing of a mandolin and classical guitar is rare in chamber music, discover how magnificently they complement each other, and traditional stringed instruments, at the July 28 concert. Broaden your musical horizons with fresh takes on classic repertoire and a few pieces arranged in a new way just for this concert! With music by composers from Greece, Israel, Italy, France, and Turkey, you can travel the Mediterranean in one night without leaving Kingston.

I DAVID KIM AND FRIENDS

On July 30, join us for what Zhu says will be "a very meaningful concert for all of us." KCMF founder and first Artistic Director David Kim will share the stage with Zhu, performing Igor Stravinsky's *Suite Italienne for Violin and Piano*. Kim and his stand partner, Juliette Kang, first associate concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra, will play Sergei Prokofiev's Sonata for Two Violins in C Major. They will be joined by Che-Hung Chen, Priscilla Lee, Clancy Newman, and Burchard Tang for Johannes Brahms's String Sextet No.1 in B-flat Major. This group of musicians had originally been invited to KCMF by Kim years ago but rarely get the chance to play chamber music together now. Their reunion in Kingston promises to be delightful for all involved — playing or listening!

I YOUNG ARTIST MINI RECITAL

Ian Lin, a 14-year-old native Rhode Islander and piano student of Zhu, Meng-Chieh Liu, and Dr. Ke-Chia Chen, will perform Franz Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasy in C Major* for our second annual Young Artist Mini Recital on August 2. Regarded as Schubert's most technically difficult composition, Lin notes that it was "an experience" to learn. The four clearly defined movements are written with connective transitions so as to be played without breaks, creating epic scale and a sense of a journey traveled for the listener.

I A WORLD PREMIERE

Back by popular demand, the GRAMMY-nominated Dover Quartet will return to Kingston on August 2 for a world premiere performance of a commissioned piece from composer Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate, a citizen of the Chickasaw Nation in Oklahoma. Tate wrote *Woodland Songs*, a five-movement piece, for the Dover Quartet, noting that it will be a "very rhapsodic and dramatic orchestration of the woodland animals that represent our clan system." From Tate's work to Antonín Dvořák's Quartet in F Major — one of the most beloved string quartets in chamber music — this program will exemplify the Dover's inimitable style as an ensemble.

DAVID KIM RETURNS TO KINGSTON

FOUNDER REFLECTS ON THE FESTIVAL'S DEVELOPMENT

In 1986, violinist David Kim visited his parents in South County. His father had recently accepted a job at URI, and it was Kim's first time visiting the area. As they drove around, he appreciated the proximity to picturesque beaches, the small-town charm of Wakefield, and the abundance of fresh seafood options. Only one thing could make this better: music.

"I remember saying to them: 'I should start something here,'" Kim says. "I had always dreamed of having a way to get my closest friends together to play chamber music in front of an audience." But in order to bring this vision to fruition, he needed money. "I went to then URI President Ted Eddy because I knew he was a lover of the arts. He sent me to the head of the URI College of Arts and Sciences, Richard Gelles," Kim says. "I told Dr. Gelles that if he could give me \$6,000 to start a music festival, I'd raise the rest." His next stop was the emporium near campus, going door-to-door selling ads for a program. "The response was very positive. And as I was selling ads, I was giving away free tickets," he recalls. "I kept saying, 'Please come; you're going to love this!'"

KCMF began with three concerts at URI's Fine Arts Center. Eight musicians came and stayed at Kim's parents' house. "We were packed in there, and my wife cooked for us," Kim recalls. "We had the most amazing time. By the third concert, the hall was close to full. I remember saying to the audience: 'Let's do this again next year!'" Kim, who has also been concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra since 1999, served as KCMF Artistic Director for the next twenty years before appointing pianist Natalie Zhu to take over. "She's so gracious," Kim says of Zhu. "She can fill many different roles. She's been a brilliant choice!"

"KCMF is my baby," he adds. "I have such incredible memories of starting the whole thing." As for his return this year, he says that it will be very nostalgic: "I am looking forward to reuniting with friends."



DAVID AND NATALIE CONSULT DURING A REHEARSAL AT THE 2018 FESTIVAL. PHOTO BY PETER GOLDBERG

WELCOME TO OUR NEW FESTIVAL MANAGER

VALERIE COOKSON-BOTTO TAKES THE REINS

This spring we conducted a national search for a new festival manager and are delighted to welcome Valerie Cookson-Botto to the KCMF community. Cookson-Botto has lived in Rhode Island since 2009 and brings a wealth of experience in arts administration. "I feel so fortunate to have had the opportunity to work in the performing arts my entire career," she says. "As a community, we are in need of the arts to bring us together, heal our hearts, and expand our minds." While her professional work has ranged from professor of dance to grant writer to director of community engagement, her connection to the arts has not exclusively been administrative. She's also a professional choreographer, drawing inspiration from a broad musical spectrum — Antonín Dvořák to Barbara Kolb. "My choreography has explored the relationship of movement and words, looking at how one can influence your perception of the other," she says. Her expertise and passion will be assets for our 2024 season. "I am excited to be part of such a highly respected festival and share my skills to keep the festival strong," she adds.



THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS ► With generous support from foundations, corporations, and community members, KCMF has proudly presented extraordinary chamber music for 36 years. Our deepest gratitude to our festival and concert sponsors: Belmont Marketplace, Launderers Trust, Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, URI College of Arts and Sciences, URI College of Engineering, URI Office of the President, and Deborah Grossman-Garber and Jonathan Garber. To support the festival: Visit www.kingstonchambermusic.org, or mail a check to P.O. Box 1733, Kingston, RI 02881. All donations are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

IN MEMORIAM

We honor the lives and legacies of two beloved members of the KCMF community: Margaret “Patty” Stout (1937–December 16, 2023) and Bettina “Tina” Letcher (May 11, 1938–July 16, 2023). “They were dear friends,” says David Kim, who founded KCMF in 1989. “As KCMF became bigger, I knew I needed help. The first person I went to was someone I knew was a big supporter of the arts in South County: Patty Stout.” Together, with Kim as artistic director and Stout as president, they created the festival’s first board.

Steve Letcher — a Professor of Physics at URI at the time — joined as the board’s first treasurer and held that position for 25 years. His wife Tina provided another invaluable form of support for KCMF: Hosting dinners and receptions at her home after concerts. “We didn’t have a lot of big parties in general,” Letcher notes. “But Tina loved doing it for David!”

“I created the festival with dedicated people like Patty and Tina,” Kim notes. “They said, ‘I’ll just do it for one term’ and ended up staying in some capacity for the rest of their lives because they loved it so much.” Thirty-six years later, the thriving festival is a testament to the commitment, hard work, and passion of these women. As Kim says, “Chamber music is all about relationships.”

Tina Letcher kept beautifully written journals, rich with history, about KCMF, which her husband Steve generously shared with us for all to enjoy. One excerpt: *Words can’t describe what we feel, all of us in the sold-out concerts. We’re drunk with all this music and half of the intoxication seems to be that it can’t stay but floats off into the air and is gone forever.* Take a trip down memory lane, in memory of Tina, and find portions of her journal on our website: www.kingstonchambermusic.org/in-memorial/



PATTY STOUT



TINA LETCHER

ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATE ▶ Beth Etter decided to conclude her service as executive director in January. We thank her for her many creative contributions and enthusiastic support for KCMF and wish her the very best with her performance career!

kingstonchambermusic.org

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