

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

CHAMBER MUSIC FEST GETS DOWN TO EARTH, WIND & FIRE

Funk group won't appear, but Felici Trio and friends promise to electrify

By Geisel

Chamber music, like its larger-scale counterparts — symphony and opera, has become a regularly performed segment of the classical music genre. Unlike its counterparts, however, its smaller, more compact arrangements give it the unique feature of being far more mal-

leable and diverse in both performance and arrangement.

And it's exactly that diversity that the Felici Trio and their special guests celebrate every year in the Mammoth Lakes Music Festival, one of the country's best chamber music concert series. And this year, among other highlights, violinist



PHOTO COURTESY CMU

Festival newbie Jennifer Banks and her red violin aren't "Fiddlin' Around." Or are they?

Rebecca Hang, cellist Brian Schuldt and pianist Steven Vanhauwaert are starting with the elements, kicking off the series

with an opening night gala, entitled "Earth, Wind & Fire," at Cerro Coso Community College on July 18.

That performance is a straight up, greatest hits show, featuring well-known works by chamber music masters, Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms, performed along with violin wizard Corey Cervosek and welcoming back pianist Paulina Zamora, after a short absence.

From there, the MLMF's program gets more adventurous, and actually back to its origins. Chamber music was never really intended to be performed in public. Most of the music created for it was for dinners and smaller social occasions, played in drawing rooms, thus the term, "chamber." Of course, as Schuldt points out, "Those drawing rooms were a lot bigger than your living room," often hosting dozens of guests.

Chopin, one of the genre's undisputed masters, gave only one public concert in his lifetime, playing the rest of his works in private concerts in drawing rooms.

Early chamber pieces, Hang explained, were called "salon pieces," to be played in the home. "The composers had fun with certain pieces, writing them in a flirtatious way, for courtship," she noted. Early chamber music was written for piano for four hands, ideally with the idea that two would-be suitors would play together. (You'll hear one of those pieces in the final night's concert this year.)

This year, program highlights include "Fiddlin' Around," Hang's response to Schuldt's "Cellisimo" evening last year, with violins taking the spotlight this year. Violinist Jennifer Banks makes her MLMF debut during the show, which includes a "violin choir" segment. (The program's working title was "The Violin Empire Strikes Back!")

The "Tour de France" is a "staged" ride through France, with Cervosek's Stradivarius violin racing against Vanhauwaert's piano in Camille St. Saëns' "Violin Sonata No. 1."

"Born in the USA" won't include any Springsteen, but will feature music from John Williams' score to "Schindler's List," as well as Leonard Bernstein's "America" from "West Side Story," as well as selections from noted American composers Samuel Barber and David Diamond.

In "Good Vibrations," you'll hear not only Mendelssohn, but also an original composition by cellist and festival veteran Emilio Colón. With shades of a bolero and tango, and a distinctly Puerto Rican style, the piece is about his grandparents' life in Puerto Rico, and comes with an introduction by Colón. The "String Sextet" by Dvorák will be a first for all six string artists, none of whom have played

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