

A Rare Find for Lowcountry Music Lovers

Written by Editor

Tuesday, 04 October 2016 13:09



For discriminating listeners in heavily populated spots around the world, chamber music offers refinement, economy of resources and flawless acoustical balance produced by a small number, usually between two and eight, of instruments in intimate conversation with one another.

The music demands exact precision of the artist and careful concentration of the audience. Over the years these demands have resulted in the finest and greatest number of chamber music performances taking place in large metropolitan areas. Thus, it is rather unique to find internationally recognized musicians playing the world's finest chamber compositions in a town of 12,000 in rural South Carolina, but that is exactly what residents and visitors have been discovering for the past 37 years in Beaufort.

From its founding in 1979 by USCB Art History Professor Mary Whisonant, the USCB Festival Series has presented internationally renowned artists such as pianists Jean-Yves Thibaudet and Richard Goode, violinists Joshua Bell and Bobby McDuffie, flautist Paula Robison, cellist Carter Bray and the Emerson, Tokyo and St. Lawrence String Quartets playing Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Ravel, Dvořák and many others. For several of the early years, performances were held at area banks and churches. In 1983 with the growth of membership and the opening of the USCB Performing Arts Center, the venue was moved to the present USCB Arts Center.

After Professor Whisonant's retirement, Beaufortonian Harriet Keyserling prevailed upon the legendary Charles Wadsworth to assume directorship and bring to Beaufort the chamber music riches he had unearthed for New York's Lincoln Center and Charleston's Spoleto. At that time

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Mr. Wadsworth had been entertaining audiences by providing informative and lively introductions of artists and compositions and his own inimitable style at the piano for over thirty years. A world-class raconteur as well as musician, he was a favorite with audiences across the US and Europe. In fact, he has been credited by some with saving the art form of chamber music from extinction.

Certainly during his two-decade tenure in Beaufort, he drew many new fans to the USCB Festival Series, and when he announced his retirement just as he was turning eighty in 2008, the Arts Center was standing room only. It was a memorable and bittersweet evening with a very large cake, many candles, enthusiastic audience participation, the presentation of a personalized parking meter with lifetime free parking from Mayor Keyserling, Wadsworth's usual wit and most importantly wonderful music played by exceptional artists. At the end, the Master expressed his great appreciation for nineteen grand years and his feelings of regret on closing the curtain on fifty years of grand music, "It's very tough to say good-bye. I plan to cry a lot."

During his directorship, local audiences became accustomed to inventive programming



and the very best young talent the world had to offer. The Lowcountry was once again blessed beyond what one would expect in this out-of-the-way spot. For thirty years the quality of the music and the talents of the artists had surprised and delighted audiences who were drawn to the region by the beauty of the creeks and marshes, little expecting to find Bach, Beethoven, and Haydn hiding in the bulrushes. The really good news is that the delight has continued under the leadership of Edward Arron, the 2016 Series Artistic Director, host and cellist.

Edward Arron spent two years assisting Mr. Wadsworth with the USCB Series, getting to know the Lowcountry audience and allowing the audience to enjoy his artistry and his thoughtful commentary and to appreciate his connectivity to the most significant young artists playing and

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composing chamber music at this time. As one of those significant young artists himself and as the Artistic Director for the Metropolitan Museum's Artists in Concert Series for ten seasons, he is uniquely qualified to ensure the continued standard of the Festival Series.

For the upcoming season, he has tapped a deep vein of talent to bring you carefully constructed programs blending works from the Baroque to the present. The oldest piece was composed 230 years ago; the youngest was written last summer. Each concert is anchored by Edward Arron and features a different set of performers in a variety of instrumental combinations playing music from the sublime to the explosive.

Considering that the Series began when USCB was a poorly funded, two-year branch campus of USC, and Professor Whisonant was not only the artistic director, but also the ticket seller, airport taxi, caterer and donor seeker and that there was a time when cutting back on Mr. Wadsworth's concerts in favor of less "pure" forms of musical performances was threatening the continuation of the Series as we know it, we can all be proud that this community still has music, artists and audiences coming five times each year that make us the cultural envy of much larger, much wealthier, and much less fortunate towns and cities.

Once again on five Sunday afternoons, Lowcountry residents can take a walk or short drive to the USCB Center for the Arts, sit in what will soon be the newly renovated auditorium, enjoy the very fine acoustics the venue provides and escape from the stresses and cacophony of 21st century living while listening to an intimate and lively conversation of extraordinarily talented artists playing brilliant and intricate pieces on their finely tuned instruments.

This season's magic begins on Sunday, October 30 at 5 pm (doors open at 4 pm) at USCB's Center for the Arts, 803 Carteret Street. Tickets start at \$42. Buy them online at www.uscb.edu/festivalseries, by calling 843-208-8246, or at the door the day of concert.