

Chamber Music Festival

Great Lakes series showcases notable and emerging artists

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
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New York violinist Ani Kavafian answers the phone as if she'd known the caller for years. Even though the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival is one of 11 she performs in this summer, the two-week series holds a special place in her heart. She's eager to talk about the role of Detroit in her career. It seems many of the festival musicians, internationally-recognized as well as emerging, look forward to performing in one or more of the 20 concerts presented in the southeast region and East Lansing the last two weeks in June.

Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival
What: Series of 20 concerts throughout Southeast Michigan
When: Saturday, June 15 to Sunday, June 30
Tickets: Five-concert series \$110, \$95 seniors/students; Seven-concert series \$130, \$115 seniors/students; Family concerts at the Detroit Zoo \$7; Single tickets \$28-\$30, \$25-\$23 seniors/students
Call: (248) 559-2097 or send e-mail to chambmusic@juno.com

Music Society of Lincoln Center, Kavafian took her first violin lessons in Detroit after moving to the U.S. in 1968 with her family. Born in Istanbul of Armenian heritage, Kavafian began her studies with Ara Zeronian on a \$16 scholarship for five seasons. He gave her the enthusiasm for the instrument. Five years later studies with Misha Mishkoff

deepened her interest in the instrument.

At age 16, she won first prize in piano and violin competitions at Interlochen Arts Camp, and by 18 decided to drop piano and began studying violin at The Juilliard School where she eventually received a master's degree with top honors. Kavafian now teaches at Yale University.

Kavafian is one of the artists on the opening program for the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival Saturday, June 15, at the Seligman Performing Arts Center in Beverly Hills. She and sister Ida Kavafian, a violinist with the Beaux Arts Trio for six years and a member of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, will perform Mozart's *Duo for Violin and Viola in B flat and Ravel's Trio in A minor* with pianist Ruth Laredo Tuesday-Wednesday, June 18-19, at St. Hugo of the Hills in Bloomfield Hills. On Saturday, June 15, Ani Kavafian joins Laredo, festival artistic director James Tocco, and the Elements Quartet for Beethoven's *Sonata in F, Op. 4* at the Seligman Performing Arts Center.



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN STEVEN

Sister duo: Ani (left) and Ida Kavafian perform Mozart's "Duo for Violin and Viola in B flat" and Ravel's "Trio in A minor" with pianist Ruth Laredo June 18-19, at St. Hugo of the Hills in Bloomfield Hills.

"I like playing in Detroit. There are some wonderful musicians to come out of the city," said Kavafian who recently returned from Armenia where she and younger sister Ida performed with orchestra and as chamber musicians. "My sister and I have performed the Mozart many times. I'm looking forward to coming back. I have so many family and friends. I'm performing in an environment I know so well. It makes me feel like home."

Like Albert knows exactly how Kavafian feels. Unlike Kavafian who's been playing professionally since 1972, he first started the bright lights of success as part of the festival's Shouse Institute, a training and performing program for emerging artists. In 1997, he and five other members of eight blackbird submitted a tape of their contemporary music and were invited to the festival. Since then their career soared.

In 1999, they released their first CD *Round Nut Too!*. The award-winning sextet plays more than a half dozen performances a month in the Midwest and along the east coast in addition to serving as ensemble-in-residence at Northwestern University and the University of Chicago. It is there they work with student composers and premiere their work.

"Great Lakes showed us how much people could appreciate what we do," said Albert. It gave us an opportunity. They were the biggest audiences we ever played for - 1,000 - in St. Hugo. People came up to us after and said we thought we weren't going to like it and you changed our mind. They made us feel our career was worth it. We got to show them we're grown."

eight blackbird plays music written only within the last five years. The members, originally from New York, Connecticut and Virginia, met in 1996 at the Oberlin Conservatory where they were all students active in the contemporary music ensemble.

On June 18-19, they perform Thomas Alvert's (Matt's father) *Thirteen Ways*, at St. Hugo's

Chapel, and repeat it on the 21st at Kerrytown Concert House in Ann Arbor along with Frederic Rzewski's *Pocket Symphony* written in 2000. On June 22 at the Seligman center, they play Roshanne Etezydy's *Damaged Goods* (2000).

"The music's beautiful with intense sounds, a wonderful palette of colors," said Albert. "We play things you don't usually hear on a chamber music concert. We have percussion by Matthew Duval. I grew up playing in string quartets. It changes your sound."

"We perform all by memory. Those of us who can stand up and move around in a way that complements what the music is saying."

Matty Okun couldn't be more delighted to perform the blackbird. He feels the sextet is one of several highlights at this summer's festival. He especially enjoys the choreography and fact they play without music.

"This group came to us and we played a part in furthering their career. The festival considers itself to have a responsibility to the art form," said Okun, festival executive director. "Part of that is passing it on to the next generation of performers and to cultivating those performers. This is the sixth year for Shouse which was funded for the first five years by the Catherine Filene Shouse Foundation. This is the first year it's not and we're looking for funding sources."

Okun's answer to the Shouse Institute by sending unedited video or audio tapes to festival organizers. Once accepted, the musicians, who must be age 30 or under, receive two-weeks of intensive coaching by Paul Katz and Henry Meyer, and perform in the festival.

"This year's emerging ensembles are Jupiter String Quartet from Cleveland; Bina String Quartet, Boston; Zoroastrian Trio, New York, and the LeeZhu Duo, Philadelphia.

"For audiences it's interesting," said Okun. "The Shouse concerts are always one of our

best selling events, eighth blackbird managed to find a way to introduce contemporary music to the audience. That's a tremendous challenge for all of us in music."

Okun is just as enthusiastic about the rest of the festival, a stellar lineup of internationally recognized artists.

"What a jewel this festival is. It's two weeks every year of fantastic music we're lucky to have access to," said Okun, who also serves as executive director of Detroit Chamber Winds & Strings who perform concerts at the Seligman center (June 29), and Detroit Zoo (3 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. June 23). "Our composer-in-residence John Harbison is one of the great contemporary composers. He's won a Pulitzer and we have players coming to us for the first time - Shmuel Ashkenazi, the Elements Quartet and they're terrific."

"We have Ruth Laredo at the Detroit Zoo playing Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*. We've added the Seligman center as a venue. Our long term goal is to extend throughout the region. That's the reason we picked the name Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival. Right now we're starting to talk with Interlochen."

Sandi Reitelman believes it's "only a matter of time before she" and co-chairs from St. Hugo of the Hills Catholic Church and Kirk in the Hills work even closer together. Sponsored by the two churches, Temple Beth El, which Reitelman directs, and Detroit Chamber Winds & Strings, the festival continues to gain a reputation for spotlighting the brightest talent.

"Most of us involved feel grateful to have chamber music here, and affect it," said Reitelman of Birmingham. "There's a great deal of intimacy associated with the art form. It's always played with ensembles without a leader in a smaller setting so there's a communication between artists when they're playing. An audience feels they're a part of that."

GUIDE TO THE MOVIES

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