

The Friends of Chamber Music's fall opener highlights chamber music by living composers

"NEW HORIZONS" CONCERT WILL FEATURE DAVID SERKIN LUDWIG'S "HASHKIVEINU," A PRAYER FOR PEACE, AND WORKS BY CHEN YI, REENA ESMAIL AND OSVALDO GOLLIJOV

BY LIBBY HANSEN

The Friends of Chamber Music, under the direction of co-artistic directors Dmitri Atapine and Hyeeyeon Park, embarks on an interesting venture this season with the concert "New Horizons," featuring works by living composers specifically curated for the Friends' audience.

"One of the things we wanted to do is explore the vibrant world of chamber music that is happening nowadays. It has never been more effervescent, more bouyant, more active," said Atapine. "Chamber music is such a nimble art form that all across the country, young people turn to it so much to do new things, to explore new ideas."

Since its founding, the organization has brought exceptional international touring artists to Kansas City. Through the years, the Friends developed three flagship series: International Chamber Music, Master Pianists and Early Music Series.

The organization has often brought new artists to Kansas City — many popular chamber ensembles have made their local debuts through the Friends — but rarely has the organization brought new work to its hometown audience.

"We want to introduce that world into the DNA of the Friends of Chamber Music," said Atapine.

"Friends of Chamber Music never had that single concert that is only comprised of living composers," asserted Park. Rarely, in fact, has the Friends commissioned new work or presented work written in the last 50 years. In 2000, they commissioned a piece by Richard Danielpour with the American String Quartet on the event of the series' 25th anniversary, and only a handful of concerts through the years have included work by living composers, including Chen Yi, Steve Reich and Philip Glass.

"We want this to be the seed that will, on one end, start to cultivate a tradition of us presenting new music, working with living composers, and on the other end, creating yet another doorway into the tradition, to showcase how vibrant it is . . .



Hyeeyeon Park and Dmitri Atapine, artistic directors, Friends of Chamber Music

one more point of access and one more point of conversation," said Atapine.

For this concert, the Friends have co-commissioned a work by David Serkin Ludwig. Ludwig currently serves as dean and director of The Juilliard School and has an impressive lineage: His grandfather was Rudolf Serkin, his great-grandfather Adolf Busch, and his uncle pianist Peter Serkin (who performed for the Friends in the 1992-1993 season).

"Sometimes, as composers, we write about things that are important to us globally. I've written music that addresses climate change, gun violence . . . a lot of different issues that

are important to me. But sometimes one writes a very personal piece and that's what this is," Ludwig said.

The piece — "Hashkiveinu"— was written in honor of his brother-in-law Joel, who died earlier this year. An influential and popular teacher of history, he had been like a father figure to Ludwig.



David Ludwig, composer

"Hashkiveinu" is a traditional Hebrew prayer. It's a nighttime prayer, said Ludwig, somewhat equivalent to the children's prayer "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep." It is a prayer for peace, asking for shelter and protection.

From that inspiration, Ludwig has written a work for piano trio. "It's a somber piece that goes through a lot of different kinds of emotional areas, as one does when thinking about life and death and memories. I try to bring all that together to make something that's poignant . . . I wouldn't even say it's heavy . . . it is more about prayer and ultimately about hope and more, in the end, about celebrating a memory."

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— Dmitri Atapine, co-artistic director, Friends of Chamber Music

The work will be performed by Park and Atapine, on piano and cello, respectively, joined by violinist Bella Hristova, Ludwig's wife. They gave the piece's world premiere in August at the Music@Menlo Festival in San Francisco, and there will be another performance with Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in Spring 2024.

Park and Atapine have been friends and collaborators with Hristova for years, and she introduced them to Ludwig. And though both Hristova and Ludwig have busy careers, doing a project together is a rare treat for them. "We don't often have opportunities to travel together or even to work together," said Ludwig, "so it's really special when we get the opportunity to do something together."

"With David's piece, we know we can trust," Park said. "We love every single piece that we've heard or played of his, so that's very important . . . having that hundred percent trust that the piece is going to be good."

The concert features works by other living composers as well, including Chen Yi's "Qi," for flute, cello, percussion and piano, Reena Esmail's "Nadiya," for flute and cello, and Osvaldo Golijov's "Mariel," for cello and marimba, which also deals with grief and remembrance.

Percussionist Ian David Rosenbaum, on the faculty at UMKC Conservatory, and flutist Sooyun Kim, of New York, round out this "New Horizons" cohort.

In their role as co-artistic directors, Atapine and Park also want the Friends organization to be more active in the community, with performances and master classes beyond the regular series. During their inaugural season, they organized more than 30 additional events in association with Friends' programming.

Ludwig also welcomes the opportunity to engage beyond the performance. "When I have a new piece like this, I really love to get to know the community that it's being presented to."

"When people meet a living composer, that changes things a lot, right?" he said. "It becomes far less forbidding, and you see this person as someone who might live down the street from you . . . I want to demystify everything about (composition) and just make it something that people can connect with."



Bella Hristova, violin



Sooyun Kim, flute



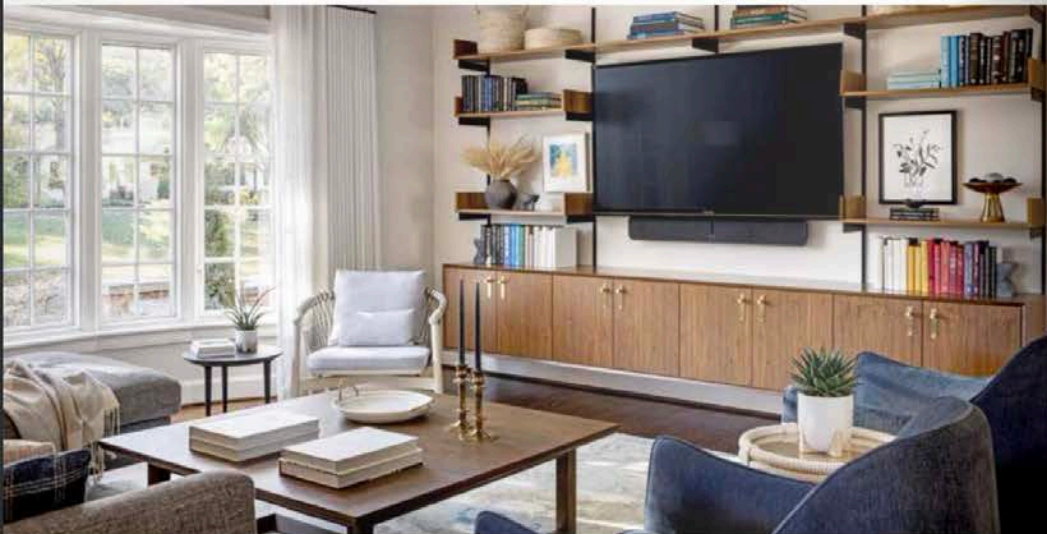
Ian David Rosenbaum, percussion

Finding more ways to connect is a priority. "(Atapine and Park) are very inclusive minded people," said Ludwig. "They want to make the music they are passionate about available to absolutely everyone."

Ideally, new music and new experiences bring more attention and interest to the art form and develop friendships on and off the stage.

"We want to expose different sound worlds," said Atapine. "There's a very rich world of chamber music." □

Friends of Chamber Music Kansas City presents "New Horizons" at 7:30 p.m. Oct. 7 at the 1900 Building. For more information, chambermusic.org.



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