

‘Where the biggies leave off...’

# Hill & Lake Press

Published for East Isles, Lowry Hill, Kenwood Isles, & Cedar Isles Dean Neighborhoods

Volume 43, Number 43

www.hillandlakepress.com

February 22, 2019

## Everyone wins when Isles Ensemble presents ‘dueling’ string trios on Sunday, February 24

By Michael Wilson

Come one, come all to Lake of the Isles Lutheran Church this Sunday as two giants — Mr. Tchaikovsky and Herr Haydn — duke it out with dueling string trios! So say the musicians of the Isles Ensemble about their third concert of the 2018-19 season, which begins at 2 pm.

Isles Ensemble (and, since 1995, Minnesota Orchestra) violist Sifei Chang has created a whimsical illustration of the contest, showing Pyotr Ilyich as the clear winner with his Trio in A Minor, Op. 50, with its cascades of notes. “Compared to the Haydn, it’s a beast to play,” Chang says.

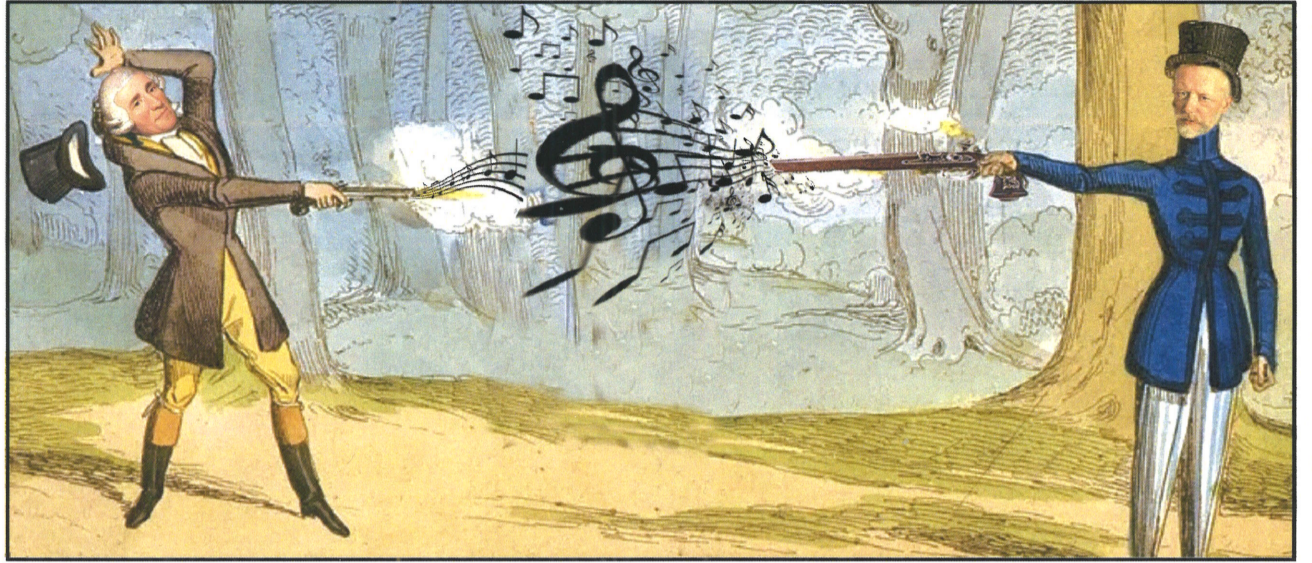
Chang is quick to add, though, that we’ll all be winners at Sunday’s remarkable concert.

### Tchaikovsky’s only string trio.

The A Minor trio is Tchaikovsky’s only work for violin, cello, and piano. In 1880 he wrote, “I simply cannot endure the combination of piano with violin or cello. To my mind the timbre of these instruments will not blend ... it is torture for me to have to listen to a string trio or a sonata of any kind for piano and strings. To my mind, the piano can be effective in only three situations: alone, in context with the orchestra, or as accompaniment, i.e., the background of a picture.” But in 1882 he overcame these reservations and wrote the mighty piece we will hear on Sunday.

“Ivan Konev, David Leung, and I will be performing the Tchaikovsky and we are excited about tackling such a huge work,” says cellist Laura Sewell. “It is not performed all that often because it is so enormous (performances of the piece are 45-50 minutes long) and the piano part alone is 91 pages! Despite its length, it is a truly beautiful work and well worth the effort to learn it.”

Sewell notes that she Konev, and Leung were all new to the piece. “We jumped at the chance to play it,” she says. “It is full of one gorgeous melody after another and all three parts are truly equal in that they are soloistic and demanding but so well written for the three instruments. The trio consists of only two movements, which is unusual in itself, and the entire second movement is a giant set of twelve variations. The variations



Dueling string trios at the Sunday, February 24 Isles Ensemble concert? Hardly; they’re both winners — although Tchaikovsky’s Trio in A Minor wins the “note count” hands down. (Illustration: Sifei Chang.)

contain every style imaginable, from a completely delightful waltz to a mazurka to a grand fugue. It is truly brilliant writing!”

### An early, delightful Haydn trio.

Before the Tchaikovsky we’ll be treated to Haydn’s String Trio in C Major, Hob V:C3, a much smaller work but a pleasure to hear nonetheless. Cellist Tom Rosenberg will be joined by violinists Leslie Shank, the SPCO’s assistant concertmaster for 24 years, and Stephanie Arrado, the Minnesota Orchestra’s assistant concertmaster for 22 years.

“The Haydn trio for two violins and cello (no viola!) is early Haydn and may even pre-date his first set of string quartets,” Rosenberg says. “It was probably composed in the period of 1755-65 and could be considered sort of a warm-up to the brilliant and revolutionary music Haydn would soon create. It is generally lovely, easy-going and humble...and could not be more different than Tchaikovsky’s Piano trio, which is on the other side of intermission of our program on Sunday.”

How to compare the two? “Tchaikovsky’s trio is massive, full of angst and tragedy (and gorgeous melodies!),” Rosenberg says. “The Haydn is petite, happy with the exception of the third movement, and full of concise and motivic rather than long melodic writing. Simply put, it is fun to play and delightful to listen to. What’s not to like?”

Rosenberg is a nationally known performer, chamber music coach, and teacher. He performs on a rare cello by Lorenzo Storioni made in Cremona, Italy in 1794.

### Estonian Arvo Pärt’s haunting ‘Fratres.’

The February 24 concert begins with the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt’s *Fratres*, for violin and piano, played by Leslie Shank and Ivan Konev. “Pärt wrote more than 20 different versions of ‘Fratres,’ which is Latin for ‘Brothers,’” Shank says. “I have always been intrigued by its haunting quality, which is especially pronounced in the violin and piano version. It is technically challenging, and I have always wanted to perform this work. It is a minimalistic work, a kind of passacaglia. Playing it in the beautiful acoustic of Lake of the Isles Church will be the perfect setting.”

Both Shank and Konev have recently released CDs, which will be available at Sunday’s concert. Konev’s CD, sponsored by the Minnesota State Arts Board and titled “Bridges,” is an exploration of unknown music by contemporary Russian and American composers.

Shank and her Shank-Hagedorn Duo partner (and husband) Joseph Hagedorn, founding member in 1986 of the Minneapolis Guitar Quartet, have just released “At Home and Abroad” on the Innova Recordings label, through the American Composers Forum. For this release, Shank and Hagedorn have selected some favorite works from their past fifteen years of performances. The music is as wide-ranging as the Duo’s interests, with influences from South American and Finnish folk music to John Dowland and “Pop Goes the Weasel”. Several other Isles Ensemble members also perform on the CD.

Concert tickets are \$15 (\$10 for seniors and students). As always, a reception follows the concert.