



'Where the biggies leave off...'

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Sunday, April 8:

Isles Ensemble's 'two-hour tour' features grand chamber music

By Michael Wilson

The musicians of the Isles Ensemble are inviting us to take a (musical) tour on Sunday, April 8 -- the last one of the season. The S.S. Minnow will board at 2 pm at Lake of the Isles Lutheran Church. Skipper (and cellist) Tom Rosenberg promises it won't take three hours.

The tour begins with "Suite in the Old Style" by Alfred Schnittke, one of the most recognizable composers of the 20th century. Pianist Ivan Konev, who will perform the "Suite" with violinist Helen Chang-Haertzen, notes that in many of his other pieces Schnittke attempted to fill out old forms with modern language. "Suite in the Old Style" is remarkable in this respect, however, according to Konev, because apart from some dissonances in the last movement nothing indicates this is a piece written by 20th-Century composer.

"People hearing 'Suite in the Old Style' for the first time when Helen and I play it on April 8 will think it could have been written by Bach, Handel or any other late Baroque masters," Konev says. "Schnittke even used symbolic musical language to underline its religious connotation (such as the 'Cross' theme in the Fugue). I think the audience will enjoy finding a few quirks that give away the stylized manner of this music."

Konev adds that Schnittke's "Suite" has made it into the repertoire of some of the famous violinists of our time and is often performed with orchestra accompaniment instead of the piano.

Mendelssohn C-Minor Piano Trio.

Konev returns with violinist David Leung and cellist Laura Sewell for the program's second piece, Mendelssohn's Piano Trio #2 in C-minor, Opus 66. The second piano trio was composed and premiered in 1845, only two years before Mendelssohn's death at age 38. It is the last chamber work that he lived to see published.

The second piano trio makes great technical demands on its performers, none more so than the pianist. Mendelssohn himself was a fine pianist and often gave the piano the lion's share of the work in his chamber music.

Sewell says that she is very happy to be performing the C-Minor Piano Trio for us on April 8. "It's one of my all-time favorite chamber works," she states. "This piece is truly a masterpiece! It has everything one could wish for in a piece: gorgeous melodies, a fantastic Scherzo movement which is devilishly difficult, and very fast, beautiful, virtuosic writing for all three instruments. Performers and audiences alike are always stirred



For their final concert of the year the musicians of the Isles Ensemble are inviting us to take a two-hour tour on Sunday, April 8. On board will be (back, left) Tom Turner, viola; Stephanie Arado, violin; Laura Sewell, cello; Tom Rosenberg, cello; and Helen Chang-Haertzen, violin. Pianists Ivan Konev and David Leung are in front. (Photo creation: Sifei Cheng. Caption: Michael Wilson.)

by the majestic finale, which contains the famous 'Doxology' hymn within the movement. It is a completely satisfying work to play and to listen to."

Dvorak String Quartet in G-Major.

Our April 8 "tour" concludes with Dvořák's String Quartet No. 13 in G Major, Opus 106, performed by Stephanie Arado and Helen Chang-Haertzen, violins; Tom Turner, viola; and Tom Rosenberg, cello. The <antonin-dvorak.cz/en> website describes this work as "unusually melodic" and "demonstrating supreme technical sovereignty and a masterful grasp of all the expressional devices at Dvořák's disposal."

But let's ask Skipper Tom Rosenberg, who will be steering the ship back to port after a successful two-hour tour, what he thinks. "The Dvorak Quartet in G major is a perfect piece to end a spring concert," Rosenberg says. "Life, energy and beauty burst forth from the pages of the music. He wrote it in 1895, shortly after his return home from America, and he just seems genuinely happy! It is a big piece, full of great melodies, magnificent harmonies, rich textures and lots

of dance-like elements.

"I'll bet many people in the audience on April 8 will not have heard this piece, or at least not have experienced the excitement and energy a live performance of it brings. I am envious of that, as they will experience the delights and surprises this masterpiece has to offer for the first time!"

Stay for the reception after the concert and get autographs from the Skipper, Mary Ann, Ginger, Thurston and Lovey Howell, the Professor, and of course Gilligan. Tell them how much we appreciate their bringing glorious chamber music into the heart of our Hill and Lake neighborhoods four times a year. And go to <islesensemble.org> to read their (real-life) biographies.

NOTE: this month's "Gilligan's Island" photo is the creation of Isles Ensemble member Sifei Cheng, who in his spare time has been part of the Minnesota Orchestra viola section since 1995.