

Preview

Singer/Songwriters to be featured on next Contemporary Youth Orchestra concert

by Mike Telin



The Contemporary Youth Orchestra (CYO) under the direction of Liza Grossman, presents *My Gift is My Song* on Saturday, March 16, beginning at 7:00 pm in Waetjen Auditorium at Cleveland State University. The concert features the winners of CYO's first-ever singer/songwriter contest and is presented as part of CYO's annual "Music and its Industry" concert.

The concept for the concert was inspired by the annual CYO Hidden Talent Show Scholarship Award Night, CYO founder and music director Liza Grossman told us by phone. "Two members' hidden talent was that they were singer/songwriters. I was so moved by the music they had written and the lyrics were so personal and happy. The songs reflected so much about who they were. So everything spawned from that."

CYO issued a call for submissions in September, with a deadline of November 1. Singer/songwriters were asked to submit up to three original, newly composed works in any style. The contest was also divided into the age groups of 8-13, 14-17, 18-21 and 22 and over. Grossman says that 60 people representing all age groups submitted songs.

CYO arranger Stefan Podell and composers Dave Young and Derek Snyder vetted the first round, narrowing the field to 25. Grossman excused herself from the adjudication process until the very end. During the final round, songs were judged on their structure, lyric content, and how well the song would translate to an arrangement for orchestra.

Once the final 14 singer/songwriters were chosen, recordings were sent to arrangers Stefan Podell, Derek Snyder, Paul Leary, and CYO alum Eden Raiz who is currently studying at the Berklee College of Music.

The instrumentation of each song was left up to the arrangers, and while Grossman doesn't like any of the orchestra to "sit on the bench," she says it does vary a little from song to song. Grossman also points out that no song is over four and a half minutes long. The songs were required to be submitted in the same key and duration that they would be performed in. "With fourteen artists performing two tunes each, this made things a lot more practical."

Grossman was very pleased with the diversity of musical styles that will be performed on Saturday's concert. "It's not like everything is in Joni Mitchell style. There is Rock, Pop, Americana, Country, Soul, R&B, and children's music. And school music." Janice Pohl, a teacher at Campus International School wrote songs with her students. The lyrics are based on the learner profile of the International Baccalaureate Program.

During the concert, performers will talk to the audience so it won't feel like a factory of songs. "We are making sure that each artist will get some attention. I really like that each artist is performing two songs. And, because each song is different, they show different sides of the artist." Grossman says this concert digs deep into the inner workings of the music industry, "and that makes it really special."

A complete list of the 14 singer/songwriters and their songs can be found on the [Contemporary Youth Orchestra](#) website.

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