

May 14 recital by Owens and Huang marks Art Song Festival's return to CIM

by Daniel Hathaway



After a fourteen-year sojourn at Baldwin Wallace, the Cleveland Art Song Festival will return to the Cleveland Institute of Music in 2018, the school where it was founded by longtime voice faculty George Vassos in 1985. The every-other-year Festival involves ten singer-pianist teams in a week of intensive coaching, including master classes and artist recitals by well-known singers and collaborative pianists.

In alternate years, the Festival brings in a renowned singer for a solo recital. On Sunday, May 14 at 4:30 pm in Kulas Hall, CIM will celebrate the Art Song Festival's homecoming with a concert by Metropolitan Opera bass-baritone Eric Owens and pianist Myra Huang.

Owens' program will include concert arias, Lieder by Schubert, Brahms, and Ravel, spirituals, and classic Broadway songs by Lerner & Loewe, Rodgers & Hammerstein, and Cole Porter. "Eric's very familiar to Cleveland Orchestra audiences," Art Song Festival executive director Dean Southern said in a telephone conversation. "The chance to hear him in the much more intimate setting of Kulas Hall will be quite thrilling."

Why did the Festival move from CIM to Baldwin Wallace? "Put most simply," Southern said, "Art Song Festival and CIM decided to go their separate ways, after which the Festival became a non-profit organization and held its first event at BW in 2004. George Vassos approached me early last year about bringing Art Song Festival back to its home at CIM. The voice faculty was immediately excited by the idea, and our new president, Paul Hogle, has been most welcoming to the organization."

Vassos will remain artistic director of the Art Song Festival, as he did during its transplantation to Berea. "George's history with this school is very long," Southern said. "He taught at CIM for 50 years, was head of the voice department for 27, and is now

Professor Emeritus.” Southern takes over the post that BW’s Joanne Uniatowski held for many years. “I’m very grateful to her,” he said. “Joanne has helped make this transition very smooth and she’s been very generous with her time.”

Though the Festival is changing venues, most aspects of the event in 2018 will follow a time-honored format. “George is working on securing the artists, and it looks very exciting,” Southern said. “We’re looking to expand our national auditions to keep drawing on as large a pool of singer-pianist teams as possible.”



Southern is already kicking around ideas for introducing Art Song to audiences by bringing it back into the domestic environments where it thrived in the 19th century. “This is music that was created for home consumption,” he said. “Pianos were newly available, publishers were seeking repertoire, and it all coincided with the proliferation of high-quality poetry, especially German. *Liederabends* (Lieder evenings) could let people experience this music the way it was originally performed, and get deeper into the poetry. Art Song is as much of a marriage between poet and composer as it is between singer and pianist. These songs are little microcosms of drama, of passion, of insight, of all the things that make us human — but in a much more compact form than most opera.”

Dean Southern brings an unusual personal perspective to the task. “I’m a pianist first. I have undergraduate and master’s degrees in piano but I always sang. And it was from accompanying so many of my friends that I got more serious about my singing. In my later 20s, I went back to school to get a master’s in voice, and eventually my doctorate, and now I’m teaching voice at CIM. So Art Song appeals to both sides of my musical

identity. I'm excited for the students, and my colleagues are thrilled. This is going to be the renewal of a wonderful partnership.”

Tickets for Eric Owens' recital are available through the Art Song Festival [website](#).

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