

Heights Arts Close Encounters series begins its 12th Season

by Mike Telin



For the past eleven years, the [Heights Arts](#) Close Encounters series has presented chamber music the way it was meant to be heard — up close and personal in intimate spaces. “I can’t believe this is going to be season twelve,” violinist and series Artistic Director Isabel Trautwein said during a telephone conversation. “I figured out that the last concert of this season will be our 50th.” Click [here](#) for ticket information.

Trautwein, a member of The Cleveland Orchestra’s first violin section, said that the idea for the series came informally. “I asked a friend if she knew of an organization that might want some chamber music concerts. She put me in touch with Peggy Spaeth, who was the executive director of Heights Arts at that time. We talked, and here we are.”

In the beginning the concerts were held in private homes, but as the demand for tickets grew, they began branching out into venues including Dunham Tavern and Museum and the Bop Stop. “Our audience likes going to both of those places. When people are so close to the musicians, it makes the listening experience even more vibrant.” A wine and dessert reception follows each performance, giving the audience the opportunity to meet the musicians.

Trautwein said that she approaches a musician to act as a leader for each concert, planning the program and choosing the personnel. “People are very generous with their time.”

This year’s season will begin on Sunday, November 12 at 3:00 pm at a restored Herrick Mews carriage house in Cleveland Heights with a program titled [Felix, Wolfi and Zoltán](#) featuring music by Mendelssohn, Mozart, and Kodály. “I’m looking forward to Jessica Lee being part of the series. She was recently appointed Assistant Concertmaster of The Cleveland Orchestra and was the grand prize winner of the 2005 Concert Artists Guild International Competition. She’s also toured with Musicians from Marlboro and the Lincoln Center Chamber Players. I’m sure that she and violinist Mari Sato of the Cavani Quartet are going to collaborate beautifully. Violist Eric Wong, who is now with the Cavani, is also on the program. I love mixing Cleveland Orchestra and non-Orchestra members together. I don’t think that happens as much as it could. We are all part of the community, and the more we come together the tighter that community becomes.”

The series continues on Sunday, January 21 at 3:00 pm at the Bop Stop with [Rhythms, Rhymes and the Kitchen Sink](#). “I don’t think many people know that Robert Walters, The Cleveland Orchestra’s principal English horn player, is also a published poet,” Trautwein said. “He will be joined by Oberlin Conservatory’s new bassoon professor, Drew Pattison, and composer/pianist Edward (Teddy) Niedermaier, who’s on faculty at Chicago’s Roosevelt University.” The program will feature poetry by Walters and a new trio by Niedermaier, as well as music by Elgar, Sibelius, and Debussy.

Patrons can shed the winter doldrums on Sunday, February 25 at 3:00 pm at the Dunham Tavern and Museum with [The Omni Quartet, from Four to More](#). The program features Brahms’s *String Sextet No. 2 in G* performed by the Omni — violinists Amy Lee and Alicia Koelz, violist Joanna Patterson, and cellist Tanya Ell — who are also members of The Cleveland Orchestra. They will be joined by their TCO colleagues, violist Isabel Trautwein and cellist Dane Johansen.

The Close Encounters season will conclude on Sunday, April 22 at 3:00 pm at Parklands Villa, Shaker Heights. [Strangers on Earth, at Home with Bach](#) will include the composer’s *Cello Suite No. 5*, selections from *The Art of Fugue*, and the *Goldberg Variations* in an arrangement for string trio performed by violinist Jessica Lee, violist Joanna Patterson, and cellist Dane Johansen. “Dane is the former cellist with the Escher Quartet, and the newest member of The Cleveland Orchestra’s cello section, and he’s put together our first all-Bach program,” Trautwein noted. “He’s also the producer of a full-length documentary, *Strangers on Earth* [presented at the Cleveland Film Festival in 2016], which charts his pilgrimage across Spain, cello strapped to his back, to perform Bach’s six cello suites on the ancient Camino de Santiago trail.”

Wrapping up our conversation, Trautwein gave a shout-out to the staff at Heights Arts. “They are an amazing organization and the people who run it, staff and volunteers, work incredibly hard. And thanks to the Paul M. Angell Foundation, we are able to offer reduced-price tickets for students ages 8-23.”

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