

Music from The Western Reserve enters a new era under Bognár

by Mike Telin



For 36 seasons, [Music from The Western Reserve](#) has presented chamber music concerts of a variety of genres performed by Northeast Ohio’s brightest talent. The organization is now entering a new era as it embarks on season number 37 with a new general manager, and a new lineup of performances.

After Elisabeth Hugh made the decision to retire following over a decade of leadership, Music from The Western Reserve and its board of directors recently announced that [Zsolt Bognár](#), pianist and host of the award-winning film series *Living the Classical Life*, would succeed Hugh as Artistic Director and General Manager.

In a press release, Chair of the search committee Linda McDonald said that “Zsolt brings energy and passion to his work. We interviewed so many talented people for the position, but Zsolt’s skills and experience were the best fit as the organization moves to its next stage.”

Although Bognár is already busy with administrative duties as part of his new position, one thing he doesn’t need to worry about is planning the upcoming series — that was already done by Hugh. “Lis has become a good friend of mine and has shown me the ropes,” Bognár said during a telephone interview. “She really has had such a passion and dedication for this community and has done so much to strengthen and expand the series.”

The season kicks off on Sunday, September 8 at Christ Episcopal Church in Hudson with a performance by multi-talented clarinetist Carl Topilow. A full schedule is below.

Bognár said that taking on the position also represents a new chapter in his life. “I’ve lived in Cleveland for twenty years, so I’ve had a long time to get a feel for the community. I’ve had a chance to meet wonderful friends. I’ve also gotten a sense of the rich cultural offerings in the region.”

That said, why was this the right time for him to take on this new challenge? “At this point in my life, I am a traveling concert pianist. I also have my show, *Living the Classical Life*, and I feel like this position was the missing piece of the puzzle in my life in terms of creative output. I think part of my personality has always been about bringing people together — curating and thinking of themes and programming.”

Bognár noted that programming has long been a part of his artistic life, but what interests him about the Music from The Western Reserve series is that it focuses on music and performers who are in some way linked to Northeast Ohio.

“I’ve looked back at the past seasons and I am close friends with so many of the names that I see, so it seemed like a great match. I’ve been familiar with the Hudson community for some years, and have enjoyed the opportunity to meet all the leaders and stewards of this organization that has been around for decades. So I’m excited to bring new ideas to reach a wider community through an involved marketing strategy and social media outreach directed at young people and forming new friendships.”

Another thing that attracted him to the job was the organization’s commitment to presenting programs of a variety of musical styles. In addition to classical music the series regularly includes jazz and other genres. It also highlights a young artist each season. “I do think it is important to have a diverse offering, a little bit of everything.”

Bognár said he looks forward to programming concerts for the organization’s venue, Christ Episcopal Church in Hudson. “I’ve been able to attend a number of concerts there — it’s right in the downtown area. It has a beautiful acoustic and a wonderful space. It’s a bright space and we also host receptions there after the concerts — which is a nice opportunity to have a meet-and-greet with the artists and the community.”

While Bognár recognizes the many positive opportunities his new position brings, he knows that the job will not be without challenges. “In classical music these days, you

have to find a balance between offering the standards — and what people love — but also keep ideas fresh and repertoire and artists engaging. That’s a balance that requires passion and vision. I’m hoping to really raise the bar — I aim to double the audiences and get more people involved. But the main thing will be to ensure the strength of the organization.”

All concerts are presented at 5:00 pm at Christ Episcopal Church in Hudson. Click [here](#) for more information.

Sunday, September 8, 2019 — Carl Topilow, clarinet

Sunday, October 6, 2019 — Colin Davin, classical guitar

Sunday, November 3, 2019 — The Omni String Quartet (Amy Lee and Alicia Koelz violins, Joanna Patterson Zakany, viola, and Tanya Ell, cello) with special guest, Frank Rosenwein, oboe

Sunday, February 9, 2020 — Isabelle Durrenberger, violin, Featured Young Artist

Sunday, March 1, 2020 — Jack Sutte, trumpet and Christine Fuoco, piano

Sunday, April 5, 2020 — Yaron Kohlberg, piano

Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 11, 2019.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)