

This weekend at ENCORE: rondos and Cleveland connections

by Jarrett Hoffman



When it comes to classical music, there's not much better party material than a rondo. It's easy to follow, the refrain lodges itself into your memory like any great pop-song chorus, and most importantly, the music tends to be fast and fun.

The folks over at ENCORE Chamber Music decided that rondos would be just the thing to keep the festivities going with this season's focus on Bohemian music and the Romani people. "There is such a danceable spirit to our theme, 'La Bohème,' and we felt that rondo movements celebrated that in a really lovely way," artistic director Jinjoo Cho said during a recent interview.

A concert titled "Round Round Rondo" — the refrains, of course, come round and round — takes place this Friday, June 28 at 7:00 pm in the Tudor House at Gilmour Academy in Gates Mills. The program includes two pieces that conclude with that musical form — Mozart's *Viola Quintet in g* and Brahms' *Piano Quartet in g* — as well as Kodály's *Serenade*, Op. 12.

Then on Sunday, June 30 at 2:00 pm at the Tudor House, the festival will honor composers with local connections in "Cavalier Cleveland," sponsored by the Bascom Little Fund. That program includes several works with folk and rock influences, as well as traditional classical music.

The first piece that came to mind for Cho was Ernő Dohnányi's *Piano Quintet in c*. Audiences are likely familiar with that surname, she noted: the composer's grandson, Christoph von Dohnányi, was Music Director of The Cleveland Orchestra from 1984 to 2002.

Then Cho thought of Michi Wiancko, a former classmate of hers at the Cleveland Institute of Music. “I respect her as a composer and as a violinist so so much,” Cho said. “She was the concertmaster of CityMusic Cleveland for a couple years, and all-around is just an incredible human being and very creative artist.”

The next stop on that train of thought was Michi’s brother Paul Wiancko. “So we have a sister-brother duo of composers,” Cho said. “Then of course there’s Dan Visconti, who studied at CIM with Margaret Brouwer. And we have Leslie Adams, a famous Cleveland composer, whose beautiful songs we’ve arranged for string quartet.”

Cho will play on both Friday and Sunday, in addition to teaching quite a bit as part of the festival’s Summer Academy, which just began. Asked if it’s a challenge to manage all of that in addition to directing the festival, she said, “It could be, but it’s what I do all year so I’m used to balancing, and I have an amazing team working with me administratively.”

Giving way to the solo-focused Summer Academy was the festival’s String Quartet Intensive, which concluded on Sunday. “It was really quite magical,” Cho said. I mentioned how impressed I was with the partnership between the young artists of the Lafontaine Quartet — formed at McGill University in 2018 — and the Jupiter Quartet, who combined for Mendelssohn’s *Octet* in a concert on June 9. It seemed to me that a special mentorship had taken place, and that the players felt a real bond.



“I think they worked together for two rehearsals and a dress rehearsal, so nothing extraordinary,” Cho said. “But it helps that [the Lafontaine] spent almost a week together

studying with the members of the Jupiter — they certainly had familiarity with each other. I also think that when two groups are compatible with each other, from the very first rehearsal there is a spark. And when rehearsals start on a good note like that, then everything is smooth sailing from there. They loved working with each other — they kept telling me about it, and they were very happy.”

Something else I observed at that concert was the supportive vibe among the festival attendees in the audience. “We’re very proud of the atmosphere that we have created,” Cho said. “It’s certainly the effort of our entire creative team and all the artists involved. The students get so much support, and I think it’s rare for musicians to feel so wanted for the duration of three weeks. It becomes a very special thing.”

And the Tudor House, she noted, is a perfect, intimate venue for these concerts. “It’s like hearing chamber music at the very source of it all — in a friend’s living room.”

ENCORE continues with another Friday-Sunday pairing of concerts on July 5 and 7 to conclude its main series, with several student performances and master classes remaining through July 14.

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