

BlueWater and Amitai Vardi celebrate Jewish music in season opener

by Jarrett Hoffman



There's something poetic about the way BlueWater Chamber Orchestra will open its tenth anniversary season next week.

Israeli-American clarinetist Amitai Vardi, a member of BlueWater since the ensemble's beginning, will solo in Srul Irving Glick's *The Klezmer's Wedding* on Sunday, September 15 at The Temple-Tifereth Israel. That's part of a 3:00 pm program led by Daniel Meyer that will celebrate Jewish music.

The Klezmer's Wedding is an important work for Vardi: he gave the North American premiere of the concerto version in 2004 at the Pittsburgh Jewish Music Festival with members of the Pittsburgh Symphony.

Glick, who has been celebrated for his contributions to Jewish music, passed away in 2002 in his native Toronto. "The way that he

captures klezmer music in the concert hall, as opposed to within a klezmer band, is unique, beautiful, and a lot of fun," Vardi said. He also pointed out the composer's authentic handling of Jewish music, saying that this concerto could easily be part of a Jewish wedding. "When I'm playing it, I definitely imagine walking around though the guests and wailing a klezmer tune."

Vardi is classically trained and grew up in a household full of classical music, but klezmer was never far away. "Living in Israel — and Jewish life being the way that it is — there's always at least a hint of klezmer surrounding you, even when you don't realize it," the clarinetist said. He noted that years later, as a student at the Cleveland Institute of Music and at Indiana University, he played in klezmer bands.

The ability to bend a pitch up and down is one technique that clarinetists need in their arsenal, especially in klezmer. “I find it fun,” Vardi said. “In a sense, it’s a little bit less refined than the classical music world, which makes it sometimes more exciting. You can let go and allow the sound to not be as exact as we are trained to do.”

The title of Sunday’s program, “Meditations and Serenades,” comes from Norman Dello Joio’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *Meditations on Ecclesiastes* and Dvořák’s *Serenade for Strings*. Dello Joio’s work, a musical interpretation of Old Testament Verses, will feature cantor Kathy Sebo as guest artist. “I know her singing and she’s absolutely wonderful,” Vardi said.

The clarinetist is just about everywhere in the area’s music scene. He’s Assistant Professor of Clarinet at Kent State University, plays in the school’s resident Black Squirrel Wind Quintet, teaches in CIM’s Preparatory Division, and plays principal in both BlueWater and the Erie Philharmonic. He’s also been spotted sitting in with The Cleveland Orchestra as a substitute, “which has been incredibly influential,” he said. And his past positions with local freelance groups are too many to name.

He’s also spreading his name further around the country. He plays in the Lake Placid Sinfonietta in New York and teaches at the Round Top Festival Institute in Texas, an experience he’s thoroughly enjoyed. “It’s been exciting to work with so many first-class music students,” he said.

We closed our conversation reflecting on his time in BlueWater, which he called “an incredible journey.” That began with the late Carlton Woods. “He put the orchestra together and really made it a staple of the community,” Vardi said.

The road continues with Daniel Meyer, who was appointed Artistic Director and Conductor in April, and who was already Vardi’s colleague in Erie, where he is Music Director. “It’s been amazing to work with him because he’s so charismatic and he’s such a fantastic musician,” Vardi said. “I feel like we have a wonderful thing going at the moment, and I’m looking forward to the next ten years. We’re working on getting out into more communities, and we have a lot of fun together.”

Tickets for Sunday’s program are available [here](#).

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