

Violinists Joseph Lin and Sarah Kapustin to make ChamberFest debuts

by Mike Telin



Coordinating the schedules of musicians and festivals is often a long, and at times, a complicated process. Take violinists Joseph Lin and Sarah Kapustin for example. Both have been on ChamberFest Cleveland's list of invitees from the Festival's beginning, but the stars have simply never aligned. Until now.

Later this week both Lin and Kapustin will finally make their ChamberFest debuts when the Festival kicks off its tenth season. Click [here](#) for details.

“Ever since Diana and Frank started the festival we’ve talked about me coming, but it never seemed to work out until this year,” Lin said. “I’m so glad that everything has finally come together.”

“I’ve known Diana since we were teenagers, so for over 20 years,” Kapustin said. “I’ve been invited from the beginning but it just never worked out. My debut should have been two years ago but because of COVID it was put on hold. So I’m happy that it’s finally on the calendar.”

We caught up with Lin by telephone from his home in New York and later with Kapustin by Zoom from her home in Zwolle, Netherlands.



[Joseph Lin](#) regularly concertizes throughout the U.S., Asia, and Europe. From 2011 to 2018 he was first violinist of the Juilliard String Quartet before stepping down to devote more time to his four young children. He continues to teach violin and chamber music at Juilliard.

Mike Telin: How did you first meet Diana and Frank Cohen?

Joseph Lin: I met Diana when we played together in a small chamber orchestra back in 2006 and our paths have crossed several times since then. I met Frank before that at the Marlboro festival. I also came to Cleveland regularly for a number of years when I was with the Juilliard Quartet. And every time Frank was kind enough to come and hear us. So it's been a nice friendship for quite a while.

MT: On Thursday you'll be joining violist Teng Li, cellist Brook Speltz, and pianist Roman Rabinovich in Brahms' Piano Quartet No. 2. Have you worked with these musicians before?

JL: I know all of them and most of that connection comes from the Marlboro Festival. But it's been quite a while since I've been together with these players — maybe even a decade or more. I don't think I've played in groups with any of them, so this is a wonderful thing to be looking forward to.

MT: What are your thoughts about the Brahms?

JL: What strikes me is how refined it is, even though in his output it is a relatively early work — at least by opus number. We all know that Brahms was so demanding of himself, so for any of his music to actually have an opus number means it has gone through rounds and rounds of revisions.

He uses the musical material in a wonderful yet economical way. Although all three of the piano quartets are fairly large. But by the clock, this one is the longest.

He always thought and painted on a large canvas and that certainly shows in this piece. But there is a patience in the way that it unfolds that is striking — he's not in a hurry to make a big bang — and I think that is one of its touching characteristics.

MT: On Friday it's Dvořák's American Quartet. It's such a popular piece, but I never get tired of it.

JL: I agree. The natural, songful lyricism is what really draws me to it. And I think what draws all of us to Dvořák's music are the rhythms that reflect his Czech origin as well as the different cultures he encountered during his time in the States.

MT: And on Saturday you're playing the Debussy Sonata with Roman Rabinovich.

JL: It's a real gem but it's been a while since I performed the piece — although I played it a lot maybe fifteen years ago. In recent years I've had the good fortune of being able to work on it with my students. So I have had the opportunity to re-think it as a work of art, away from my instrument.

Its freshness, inventiveness, and its breaking away from tradition, is what we have all come to know about his music. But what has struck me in recent years as I have worked on it with students is how rigorous and traditional his music is once you get below the surface of it. Yet it always comes off as fresh and new and full of imagination. And that imagination is hard to beat.

MT: This is the obligatory question of our time: what kept you going during the past two years?

JL: One could say there was less to do, but to have that quiet time was a luxury. A luxury to do the things that need that time and space. Although you certainly don't set out to find a period like the last two years in order to do these things. But they don't appear in your mind as a possibility until you are in the midst of the quietness.

We're a family with four little kids running around so it never got too quiet, and certainly not isolated. But performing — especially during the first year — was very quiet. It was also a time for artistic exploration, and I had the good fortune to continue working with people that I know.

I enjoyed some aspects of period performance. I did a Bach unaccompanied cycle just before the pandemic on a kind of modern setup, then in the late summer of 2020 I found myself thinking that it would be wonderful to really explore Baroque playing in earnest, so I did another Bach cycle with a Baroque setup.

The Classical and Romantic periods had their own sound worlds that were not the Baroque, and not what we are accustomed to today. So I had the time to explore that range of periods and styles. And once you get a foot in it, it will always be in the mix. I also worked with Robert Levin, who is a genius at all of that.



[Sarah Kapustin](#)'s musical activities have taken her across North and South America, Europe, Asia and Australia in performances as soloist, chamber and orchestral musician. She resides in Zwolle, the Netherlands, where she is active as a chamber musician and soloist. A sought-after teacher, she is professor of violin at the ArtEZ Conservatorium in Zwolle, professor of chamber music at the Prins Claus Conservatorium in Groningen, and on the faculty of the Sweelinck Academie in Amsterdam.

Mike Telin: You're making your debut on Friday with George Walker's Adagio from String Quartet No.1 "Lyric." Walker's music is finally getting the attention it deserves.

Sarah Kapustin: It's about time. He's a composer who is a good example of being underrepresented, so I'm happy that Diana programmed the piece. I've never played it and we're only doing the second movement, but it's beautiful. I don't know why people don't play it.

MT: Also on that program is Grshwin's Porgy & Bess in an arrangement by Heifetz for violin and piano.

SK: I've never performed it, but it's a fun arrangement. Heifetz also arranged the *Three Piano Preludes* for violin and piano, and I think he made a suite from *An American in Paris*. The music is great to start with, but Heifetz adds his own personality to it like adding extra voices to the violin part. He also tries to notate the way that he slides around the instrument — which finger he uses to shift to another position. So if you play what he wrote on the page you can sound a little bit like him, which is cool. But of course no one can sound like Heifetz.

MT: Friday's program also includes Tigren Mansurian's Agnus Dei.

SK: It's a very beautiful piece. I've never played any of his works but one summer at Marlboro he was the composer-in-residence so I have met him. The piece sounds very dreamy, and I remember that from other pieces of his that I've heard. He creates a special texture with the way he uses the instruments — which is the same instrumentation as for the *Quartet for the End of Time*.

The entire program on Friday is fascinating: The Kings Return [vocal quartet] is also part of it, so it's a nice mix of pieces and styles

MT: On Saturday night you're playing the Schubert B-flat piano trio.

SK: I'm pretty lucky, I've got great pieces. I've never played this trio but I have played the E-flat trio a lot. But the B-flat has been on my bucket list for a long time, so I'm thrilled to finally be able to dig into it.

It's a monster but unbelievably beautiful. It has that Viennese elegance and humor, and the slow movement is so heartfelt and expressive. I think that I may love it even more than the other one.

When I was young I would often listen to a recording by the Borodin Trio which included violinist Rostislav Dubinsky — he was my chamber music teacher when I was in high school. I have a clear memory of hearing his sound, especially in the first movement. So it is exciting for me to finally get to play it.

MT: Speaking of growing up, you're from Milwaukee. How did you get from there to Zwolle, Netherlands?

SK: [laughing] I'll try to sum it up in less than several hours. I was born in Milwaukee, and when I was 16 I moved to Bloomington, Indiana with my mother. My teacher, both in Milwaukee and Bloomington, was Mimi Zweig. I finished high school there, and was then admitted into the undergraduate program at IU. Then a masters at Juilliard.

After that I got a Fulbright to study in Paris. So I moved to Europe in 2006 and did a chamber music degree at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique.

I was in a piano trio — we played the Schubert E-flat but not the B-flat. I was planning to move back to the States but my dream was to be in a string quartet. So I let people know that I was interested in finding a quartet. I got a call from the Netherlands-based Rubens Quartet, we played together for a weekend and they invited me to join.

Although the Quartet disbanded, all was not lost, because that's where I met my husband who was the quartet's violist. Then I got jobs in two conservatories, we bought a house and have a four-year-old daughter. So we're settled here.

It's funny because when I got the Fulbright to go to Paris, my mother said that I would never move back from Europe — and she was right.

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