

Stars in the Classics cabaret: a melting pot of music, visual art, and dance

by Stephanie Manning



If you've driven past the Cleveland History Center, you've likely spotted a memento from Euclid Beach Park. The large, colorful carousel visible through the glass windows entertained visitors at the lakefront amusement park until its closure in 1969.

Jodi Kanter has fond memories of visiting as a child. "My grandfather and my father worked there as teenagers," she said. "And I think my father ran the carousel at one time."

For the past year, Kanter has been helping memorialize the Park through music, via a commission from composer Chris Neiner. And on Saturday, September 28 at 4:00 pm, M.U.S.i.C. – Stars in the Classics will present the world premiere of the final movement at Praxis Fiber Workshop.

The free event, "A Classical Cabaret at Praxis," features the fourth movement of Neiner's *Tales of Euclid Beach Park* together with works by Boccherini, Milhaud, Price, and more. Dancers from the Cleveland Ballet will join during Alfred Schnittke's *Suite in the Old Style*, choreographed by artistic director Timour Bourtasenkov.

M.U.S.i.C.'s collaborations with dancers began at its 2023 cabaret event, which was also hosted at Praxis. "I've always been interested in dance, and last year we worked with some dancers from the Ohio Contemporary Ballet," said Kanter, who is the group's artistic director. "It just worked so well — the musicians had never played for dancers before, and the dancers have so little opportunity to perform for live music."

That 2023 event also spotlighted Neiner's piano quintet with the work's first movement. Since then, the performers have premiered the second and third, and now the journey will conclude with the performance of "Hills, Thrills, and Flying Turns."

"So now we're finally wrapping it up, and we're making a recording of the piece that we'll make into a video," Kanter said.

Neiner, who earned his master's degree from the Cleveland Institute of Music, is in the early stages of his career, just like the performers at any M.U.S.i.C. concerts. The acronym stands for "Musical Upcoming Stars in the Classics," referring to the group's young performers, many of whom study or have studied at local conservatories.



In September's performance, the musicians range from "already graduated and starting to have a career, to a student who's a junior," Kanter said. "I feel like when a younger musician is playing with a colleague that's more along in their career, it's a really good experience for them."

With a combination of strings, piano, and guitar, the program features works like Florence Price's *Fantasia Nègre*, the "Fandango" movement from Luigi Boccherini's *Guitar Quintet No. 4*, Darius Milhaud's *Scaramouche*, and more.

Before she founded M.U.S.i.C., Kanter worked as a fiber artist, and some of her pieces are currently displayed at Praxis Fiber Workshop. That's why hosting a performance there intrigued her, she said: "Here we are with music, dance, and art all happening in one space."

The small, intimate venue has no raised stage, allowing the audience to get an up-close experience. And that feeling goes both ways. "I'm surprised how much our musicians really like the feeling of having their audience right there," Kanter said. "You get feedback and you can see that they're really listening."

She added that she hopes that people who attended M.U.S.i.C.'s event at Praxis last year will be interested in coming again. "People don't know about us because we're competing with so many different music organizations," she said, "but hopefully we're doing something a little different with our collaborations and the music we're presenting."

The group continues to expand into new venues, with upcoming performances at the Cleveland Museum of Art on October 23 and December 4. Kanter also has her sights on the Cleveland History Center and its gleaming carousel. Once Neiner's *Tales of Euclid Beach Park* is recorded, she said, "I'm hoping at some point we can show the video there."

Published on ClevelandClassical.com September 11, 2024.

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