

## Wayne Center Presents: Chamber music among friends in Wooster

by Stephanie Manning



A '60s cafetorium might not sound like a great place to hear chamber music. But at the Wayne Center for the Arts, there's more to the concert venue than meets the eye.

"Crazily enough, it has unbelievably sharp, nice acoustics for chamber music," Jarrod Hartzler said in a recent interview. "It is not fancy. It is not super comfortable. But it is acoustically great."

Hartzler is the vice president and managing director of ESQYRE, an Ohio-based music education non-profit partnered with the Wayne Center for the Arts in Wooster. The two organizations have created a concert series called "Wayne Center Presents," featuring musicians both local and otherwise. The third season began earlier in January and will present monthly chamber music concerts through May 2025.

Almost all the musicians are people Hartzler knows personally, particularly from the six years he spent as executive and artistic director of the Tuesday Musical Association. "I promise them a lovely weekend at a B&B, my forever adoration, and a little bit of money," he said.

Violinist Chad Hoopes and pianist Wu Qian opened this year's season on January 25, and the trio of violinist Jinjoo Cho, cellist Max Geissler, and pianist Hyunsoo Kim are soon to follow on February 15. Hartzler used Cho's past performances at the Wayne Center as an example of how well chamber music can work in the 100-seat venue.

"The intimacy of it is the most exciting part," he said. "The musicians are right there, three feet away from you. So people are always like, 'Oh my gosh, it's so energetic.' Especially if someone like Jinjoo Cho is playing."

More local faces will appear on March 14 with a visit from the Theron Brown Trio, a jazz group led by pianist Theron Brown with drummer Zigg Darden and bassist Jordan

McBride. “He's a longtime friend from all my Akron days,” Hartzler said of Brown. “His group is great — everyone loves him.”

April 18 brings pianist Fei-Fei, a winner of the Concert Artists Guild Competition and a past finalist at the Cliburn Competition. Although Hartzler has only met her once, he said she was equally eager to come and perform in Wooster.

That sentiment is shared among all the performers on the series, he added. “The artists that are coming care — they care that a new series is trying to be formed, that it’s not in a major metropolitan place, and about the importance of classical music having a root in new places.”

Community engagement is another key theme. Hartzler’s organization ESQYRE is the educational wing of the Escher String Quartet (*pictured, right*), who will close out the season with a performance on May 3. The official non-profit was formed during the pandemic, but its roots began in Hartzler’s time at Tuesday Musical, where the Escher held a four-year residency.



“I would load them in a Honda Odyssey and we would drive from college, to high school, to elementary school, to community organization,” Hartzler said. Particularly for schools with small orchestra programs, “when we built a rapport with those teachers, it helped them deliver their curriculum and improve the quality of the orchestra so much.”

The Escher’s current work through ESQYRE includes a residency at Ashland City Schools, and now local connections are being made with the Wayne Center Presents performers as well. For anyone on the concert lineup, “we make it pretty clear to local schools that if they're interested in having the artist in their school, we’ll do everything we can to make that happen,” Hartzler said.

He added that the musicians themselves are usually eager to come perform in Wooster again. “Every year, they all write to me like, ‘When can I come back?’ And I always say, ‘I don't have any more money,’ and they don't care.”

The audience is also plenty appreciative. “One lady ran up to me after a concert last year and said, ‘I’m so glad you have so many good friends!’ Well, I am too.”

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com January \_\_, 2025.  
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