

## Cleveland Chamber Symphony puts its annual spotlight on composing's next generation

by Stephanie Manning



The Cleveland Chamber Symphony has changed plenty since its founding more than 40 years ago. But some things are still the same.

In addition to the Symphony's performing work, founder Edwin London "firmly believed that it could be an educational tool as well," music director Steven Smith said. So in 1983, the Young & Emerging Composers Concert was born — an annual opportunity for the ensemble to play an entire program of new works by local student composers.

This tradition is set to continue on Saturday, March 8 during the Symphony's "NEOSonicSpring" program, presented at 4:00 pm in Baldwin Wallace Conservatory's Gamble Auditorium.

London "understood how difficult it is for young composers to have their music played by professional groups," Smith said. Like London, Smith is also a composer and knows the benefits of such an opportunity.

"Whenever you're able to hear what you've conceived in your head actually come into life, you always learn a lot," he said. "What you can trust in your inner ear, what you need to think about a little bit more, and all kinds of practical things."

Although the application process has evolved over time, the composers are still drawn from colleges and universities in Northeast Ohio. This year's Young & Emerging (Y&E) group includes seven composers and their corresponding institutions: Jose Howard-Guerra, University of Akron School of Music; Anthony Malinowski, Baldwin Wallace Conservatory of Music; Yeonsuk Jung, Bowling Green College of Musical Arts; Joshua Beacom, Cleveland State School of Music; Theodore Lovinski, Kent State School of Music; Graham Lazorchak, Oberlin Conservatory; and Colin Schrein, Wooster College.

Interest remains high, so “we tweaked the process a few years ago to work more directly with faculty members at the various institutions,” Smith said. Those faculty then nominate a student “who has enough knowledge of orchestration to be able to get the greatest educational benefit out of the experience. This has worked really well.”

Each year brings a variety of musical approaches. “Some people are very interested in something programmatic, hoping to tell a story — I see a lot of pieces about humans’ role in the universe, pondering concepts like that. And then others want to write something that is purely an exploration of musical material — melody, harmony, texture, and color,” Smith said.

“It’s basically all the same players, all the same instruments playing in each piece,” he added. “But you can hear how divergently each of the composers deal with the ensemble. That’s always a fascinating part of the process.”

Time is of the essence when it comes to the Y&E concert. This year, the entire process — from first rehearsal to final performance — is only two days total.

“A big point that I always try to impress upon each of the composers is, you want to try to answer as many questions in your score as you possibly can,” Smith said. “The more accurately you can describe and notate what it is you are intending, the less rehearsal time you waste with talking instead of actually playing the music.”

After that whirlwind of a weekend, the composers will walk away with a recording of their piece, which they can use in future applications to schools or competitions — or just to remember the experience itself.

“I think some of them come away a little overwhelmed, which is totally understandable,” Smith said. “So then they’re able to review the recording, go over it with their teachers, and reflect on what they might have done better, what worked really well, and have those lessons to take with them.”

In Northeast Ohio, you don’t need to look far to see Y&E alums doing great things. Case in point: Clint Needham, who had a piece performed by CCS in 2003 and is now professor of composition and composer-in-residence at Baldwin Wallace. But no matter where the emerging composers end up, Smith said he enjoys following what they do next.

“Every now and then, we’ll see somebody who had been a Y&E composer suddenly reaching national prominence for different things. That’s always fun just to track their careers and see how they grow and develop.”

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