

ENCORE Music & Ideas Festival dances its way to the 10-year mark

by Stephanie Manning



When you're excited about something, sometimes all you want to do is get up and dance. Hence the title of this year's ENCORE–Gates Mills Music & Ideas Festival: “By Leaps & Bounds.”

“We wanted to have an image of a celebratory dance for our 10th anniversary,” said artistic director Jinjoo Cho in a recent interview. “And the theme also looks forward to the next ten

years of our festival. So it just seemed like a perfect double meaning.”

Since 2016, the ENCORE Chamber Music Institute has hosted its annual summer concert series here in Northeast Ohio, featuring performances by local and visiting artists. The Summer Academy, which takes place simultaneously, provides training, mentorship, and performance opportunities for young musicians ages 13 to 26. This year's Music & Ideas Festival begins on June 6, and tickets are available [online](#).

The opening concert, “Drum Beats and Bugles Blow!,” brings a program of Baroque selections into Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Fittingly, the Park is also celebrating a milestone anniversary — its 50th year in operation. “So it's a very meaningful collaboration for us,” Cho said.

Adding an outdoor venue to the schedule is part of ENCORE's efforts to bring the Festival performances out into the local area. In earlier seasons, all the concerts took place on the campus of Gilmour Academy in Gates Mills, where the Summer Academy for young musicians is still hosted.

But “over the years, there was a request and a need to expand into the overall Northeast Ohio area,” Cho said. So, starting in 2023, the Festival broadened its reach. This year's locations include Federated Church in Chagrin Falls, Harkness Chapel at Case Western

Reserve University, Warner Concert Hall in Oberlin, and the Maltz Performing Arts Center in Cleveland.

One headline concert will still take place in Gates Mills. On June 7, “By Leaps & Bounds” comes to the Dodero Center for the Performing Arts, featuring saxophonist Nick Zoulek and dancer-actress Euseon Song. Sharing its title with the festival as a whole, the concert will also include visual projections designed by Jonghoon Ahn and the world premiere of *Dream of Salmon*, composed by An Binh Tat to match Song’s original choreography.

Zoulek, who is also a composer, has written pieces incorporating both dance and spoken word. And as it happens, not only was Song part of a professional contemporary dance company in South Korea, she now studies acting in Los Angeles. “That combination posed a unique opportunity for us to present these two artists together,” Cho said.

Continuing the dance theme is “Golden Waltz” on June 15, which takes its title from Erich Korngold’s *Piano Quintet*. “There’s a kind of lilt that is present throughout his music,” Cho said of the Austrian composer. “We paired it with a lot of different works that also have a kind of lilting beauty to them.” And on June 13, “1, 2, 4, 8... Tango!” presents works with a steadily increasing number of players — from solo violin to an ensemble of 12 cellos.

As usual, Cho herself has curated an artistic director’s “Carte Blanche” program on a theme of her choosing. “Ghosts, Spirits, and Dance” on June 8 pays homage to the supernatural with pieces by Ravel, Brahms, and Wieniawski. The violinist will also be featured in “The Ringing of Cimbalom” on June 14, where her chamber group Trio Seoul joins violist Mathieu Herzog for some Eastern European selections.

Later in the month, the students of ENCORE’s Summer Academy will present a series of free concerts on June 20 and 21. The past ten years have presented a few variations on the Academy’s curriculum, and “about three years ago, we came to a point that really is stable and is meaningful for the students,” Cho said.

In addition to individual string players, the program also admits four pre-formed string quartets per year. Within the Academy’s age range of 13 to 26, these groups “tend to be a little bit older than our individual students,” Cho said. “So they become peer role models within the student community.”



Back in 2016, preparing to launch the first version of the Festival, “I think I was young and stupid enough to be fearless,” Cho good-naturedly confessed. “It’s a really meaningful thing that we’ve been around for 10 years. I can’t believe it.”

In the early days, ENCORE took each year as it came. But “our organization has grown a lot over the years, and we’re now in a position to look at the next ten years and really plan for the future,” she said. “That in itself is an amazing thing.”

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