

ENCORE celebrates their loved ones with “In Your Arms at Last” (June 13)

by Stephanie Manning



Each time a new group of musicians took the stage at Federated Church on June 13, excited whoops and cheers arose from the students of the ENCORE Summer Academy. As is traditional, the young musicians had been bussed in to hear their faculty mentors perform as part of the ENCORE - Gates Mills Music & Ideas Festival — and their delight at seeing their teachers onstage brightened the atmosphere considerably.

That Saturday evening marked the second-to-last performance of the Festival with a program titled “In Your Arms at Last,” presented on a temperate summer evening at the venue in Chagrin Falls. “Today’s program is all about love,” violinist and artistic director Jinjoo Cho told the audience from the stage. Works by Wagner, Beethoven, Strauss, and Robert Schumann focused on moments of tenderness and transformation.

Although Festival concerts no longer begin with a guest lecture, Cho still took a moment to describe the music. She also commented on how much ENCORE has enjoyed Federated Church’s acoustic, which is indeed lovely (even if the pews are much less comfortable).

Richard Wagner’s *Siegfried Idyll*, originally written for a small chamber orchestra, appeared here as a string quintet — the Verona String Quartet augmented with double bassist Brennen Taggart. Premiered as a birthday gift for Wagner’s wife Cosima, the piece feels sunnier compared to the composer’s stereotypical heaviness. And it came across as romantic with both a lowercase and uppercase “R.”

Violinists Jonathan Ong and Dorothy Ro gamely led the way for much of the piece, with cellist Jonathan Dormand and Taggart filling out the low register. The addition of the double bass, which often plays in unison with the cello, added a lot of depth to the

sound, enhanced by Taggart's musicality. A section closer to the end featured violist Abigail Rojansky's pleasantly full bell tones.

The middle portion of the program became more intimate, featuring two selections from violinist Brendan Shea and pianist Hyunsoo Kim. Ludwig van Beethoven's "Zärtliche Liebe" (Ich liebe dich) is a short, straightforward piece that felt quite comfortable in the duo's hands. The emotional intensity was heightened with the arrival of Robert Schumann's "Widmung" from *Myrthen* (arr. Leopold Auer). The violin line takes the lead here, and Shea spun through double-stops and a twisting cadenza with ease.

The septet of musicians who ascended the stage for Richard Strauss' *Metamorphosen* received a rockstar welcome, with the volume of the students' cheers visibly surprising Cho and some of her colleagues. The longest work on the program, this was also the most intense, direct, and even ferocious — a response to the devastation wrought by World War II.

Strauss' writing does get a bit indulgent here, with long stretches of what sounded like maximum volume. Still, cellists Brannon Cho and Max Geissler were able to project over the rest of the group without sacrificing the center of their tone. And there were also more gentle moments to enjoy — violist Lynne Ramsey performed a beautiful, sensitive solo early on.

The group remained committed to the performance and maintained a high level of concentration, resulting in plenty of smiles and hugs at the conclusion. The music clocked in at only an hour total, sending everyone out into the evening with plenty of daylight to spare.

Published on [ClevelandClassical.com](https://clevelandclassical.com) June 24, 2026

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