Rush Hour reinvents itself for summer

JOHN VON RHEEN
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The sudden death in January 2004 of Deborah Schlimme, who founded and directed the free weekly classical Rush Hour Concerts series from its inception in 2000, concludes the demise of the series, so inextricably linked to her artistic vision.

But as the summer showcases music and musicians—great music for busy lives—the series bills itself—begins its 16th season of mini-concerts at the end of the workday this week at St. James Cathedral in Chicago's River North area, the attendance remains solid, the programs imaginative, the artist high-caliber.

New leadership has effectively reinvented Rush Hour Concerts, which presents live concerts beginning at 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Aug. 25 in the acoustically congenial church, 630 N. Huron St., at the corner of Wabash Avenue and Huron.

Retroting Rush pianist has been a delicate balancing act for pianist John Arliot Devroye, who took over as the series artistic director in September and has served as interim director for the previous seven months.

On hand, he wonders that the audience remain true to Sobo's mission of providing a relaxed concert experience that would be, in his words, "as open and accessible as possible." On the other hand, he wanted to tweak the format enough to enliven the programs and attract a wider, perhaps younger, audience.

"Keeping with the traditions Debbie started, I also wanted to bring in performers who hadn't been with us previously and experiment with the presentation of the series," he explains. The violist, an associate professor at the Northern Illinois University School of Music in DeKalb, has performed several times on the Rush Hour series as solo artist and with the Arulan String Quartet, whose violinist he has been since 2004.

With fresh ideas from Devroye and the input of participating artists, this year's concert schedule sets masterpieces of the chamber music repertoire alongside newer music that will provide a forum for some of Chicago's leading composers and contemporary ensembles.

A three-concert "Here and Now" series, for example, will include performances by the Fifth House Ensemble (works of Stanley Draper, Don Vincenzi), the Spectral Quartet (music by David Reminick), and Third Coast Percussion (works of Glenn Kotche, Augusta Read Thomas and David Skidmore). "We want our audience to engage with the music on whatever level they want to—whether they are seasoned concertgoers or trying classical music for the first time," Devroye says.

Rush Hour always offered preconcert receptions during which listeners could chat up the musicians before rather than after hearing them perform.

This season takes the idea a step further, to what the artistic director calls "curated conversations about the evening's activities." Reading material—essays, book chapters, blog posts—and much—will be available to listeners in advance of the coming week's concert, providing a starting point for audience participation.

"I never cared for the idea of a lecture following the audience's information," says Devroye. "I'm much more interested in developing a community of listeners with their own perspectives, sharing their ideas about what we are doing. The audience will be free to create whatever experience they want it to be.

Putting together the series is rather like assembling a jigsaw puzzle made up of myriad tiny pieces, as he puts it. But he considers himself fortunate to have able colleagues assisting him. They include pianist Kuang-Hao Huang, Rush Hour's associate artistic director; CSO cellist Brant Taylor; consulting artistic director; Kitty Rothchild, executive director; and Anna Solomon, concert producer, along with several staff members and interns.

Performing artists and ensembles accept an honorarium considerably smaller than their normal concert fees, because they value the series and the additional outlet it gives them, Devroye explains. Costs are covered by private donations, foundation and organizational support and government grants. Rush Hour concerts typically attract audiences of 200-300 listeners, although several performances last summer drew capacity crowds of just over 600, he reports.

Huang's primary duty is overseeing Rush Hour's annual "Make Music Chicago," a citywide celebration inspired by the annual "Fete de la Musique" in Paris. The Fifth Lynx Opera Orchestra concertmaster Robert Hanford and his wife, Sheila Hanford, violins; and Chicago Symphony Orchestra concertmaster Brant Taylor, cello, and Laurence Neuman, violin. Violinist Bradiner brought to the city's Garden Festival, "Violin: In Dialogue," a new edition of the chamber music series, which featured cello virtuoso David Schneider composed in celebration of the 100th anniversary of 2000 and subsequent years. The festival's setting adds an extra layer of intrigue.

Rush Hour, in turn, has brought to the city's Logan Square Festival, "Violin: In Dialogue," a new edition of the chamber music series, which featured cello virtuoso David Schneider composed in celebration of the 100th anniversary of 2000 and subsequent years. The festival's setting adds an extra layer of intrigue.

Rush Hour has been one of the more notable success stories in Chicago chamber music. The festival is currently being curated by Stanley Draper, Ken Dalgas, and Hau Nguyen. The series is also a breeding ground for many of the city's finest musicians, and it has provided a platform for emerging artists to showcase their talents.

Rembrandt's season finale

The Rembrandt Chamber Players has been one of the most successful and respected chamber ensembles in Chicago. They have presented a variety of programs over the past few years, including a season-long series of performances at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance, and an annual series of concerts at the University of Chicago.

On Sunday, Rembrandt will present a program of works by Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Brahms. The concert will be held at 3 p.m. in the University of Chicago's Mandel Hall. Tickets are $25 for adults and $15 for students and seniors.

As usual, the ensembles will feature a diverse range of musical styles and genres, with something for everyone to enjoy. The performances will take place in a beautiful and acoustically ideal setting, with outstanding acoustics and a warm and inviting atmosphere.

The Rembrandt Chamber Players has been a leader in the Chicago music scene for many years, and they are always looking for new ways to engage with their audiences. They are dedicated to performing the highest-quality music and to bringing the joy of music to as many people as possible.

Join us for an afternoon of great music! For more information, please visit www.rembrandtchamberplayers.org. 