

Preview: Chamber Music Society of Ohio keeps its concerts on an intimate scale

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The architect Daniel Burnham is supposed to have proclaimed, “Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men’s blood”. But flutist George Pope has been busy this summer thinking small for his organization, the Chamber Music Society of Ohio. We reached him by phone earlier this month to hear about the CMSO’s plans for 2010-2011.

“Part of our mission statement is performing chamber music in the environment for which it was intended. You know, a small, intimate space that really allows the audience to be close to the musicians. And we have always tried to keep it to that and not try to perform in bigger spaces. Of course any performance can be magical, but when you’re sitting right next to a cello or a piano or a flute or a voice, it’s a totally different experience”.

Two of CMSO’s four concerts next season will be performed in a house in Bath. “It is a private home that has sort of a grand hall where we do the concerts. There is a piano, a very lovely Steinway. Sometimes we set it up in concert style and sometimes we set up tables and do a semi-formal dinner. It has a very high ceiling, and beautiful acoustics.”

On Sunday, September 12 at 5:30, an evening of “Dynamic Duos” features CMSO founders George Pope and David Fisher with guests Regina Mushabac, cello, Jane Berkner, flute, and three pianists: Eric Charnofsky, Nancy Daley and Barbara MacGregor in double duos by Telemann and Robert Maggior, duos by Franz Doppler, Gershwin and Brahms “and a rare performance of George Crumb’s

Voice of the Whale for flute, cello and piano”, with an indoor picnic thrown in.

The fourth performance, “Blockbusters!” on Sunday, June 5 at 5:30 includes dinner with champagne. Guest musicians Alan Bodman & Cory Smith, violins, Ann Smith, viola, Gregory Fiocca, cello, and William Hoyt, horn, will collaborate with Pope, Charnofsky and Fisher in a program featuring Schumann’s Piano Quintet, Mozart’s Quintet for Horn & Strings and Copland’s Duo for flute and piano.

The audience for those two house concerts is limited. Only sixty subscriptions are being sold for the CMSO season -- the maximum seating capacity for dinner concerts like the September 12th opener -- though 75 to 80 seats will be available for the June 5 event.

Interested subscribers should act quickly. “Generally our subscriptions are filled by the middle of August”, Pope observes, but there will be two other opportunities for larger but still intimate audiences to enjoy CMSO’s programming. “For our middle concert at the Akron Women’s City Club, we can seat ninety people. That concert is in what they call their ballroom -- another lovely space in an old mansion”.

That event, entitled “Do I hear a Waltz—or a Polka?” is scheduled for Sunday, February 13 at 3:30 and will bask in its proximity to Valentine’s Day with Brahms’ Liebeslieder Waltzes, their irreverent cousins, P.D.Q. Bach’s Liebeslieder Polkas, selections from Rodgers and Sondheim and Franz Strauss pieces for horn and piano. Featured vocalists are Valerie Thorson, Susan Wallin, Kyle Kelvington and Kenneth Kramer, plus hornist William Hoyt and the four hands of David Fisher and Nancy Dailey on the piano. Hors d’oeuvres and wine are part of the deal.

George Pope started CMSO along with Valerie Thorson and David Fisher (pictured above). “We’ve been doing this almost twenty years. When we started we did nine seasons and then for a bunch of different reasons we took a break, and it’s been four years since we started back again We keep do-

ing it because we get to play fun music and get to work with our friends”.

And those friends will take a big part in the second event of the season, a free collaborative performance with Akron Baroque on Thursday, September 30 at 7:30 at Akron’s First Congregational Church, where Valerie Thorson is music director. “What we have scheduled so far is Bach’s Brandenburg #2, but we will be doing it with Bill Hoyt on horn instead of piccolo trumpet, and then there is the C.P.E. Bach double keyboard concerto. And then we are going to be doing things that have not just a single but several soloists, like a Telemann concerto for flute, oboe and violin.”

The September 30 concert is a larger event, but even though First Congregational seats several hundred, its elegant, wraparound balcony puts everyone close to the action and creates the intimate chamber music ambiance that Pope and his colleagues are seeking.

Some of those sixty available subscriptions may still be available for \$180 per person. Call 330.869.9113 to request a subscription form. Individual tickets will be available for the September and February concerts and will be sold first come, first served two weeks before each concert.