



Montclair orchestra connects the dots



MSU grad student violinist Aurora Mendez annotates her score with Rebecca Lee Harris the Cali School of Music, Sun. Sept. 23. for "A Shakespeare Evening." ADAM ANIK/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

Montclair Orchestra
Sunday, Sept. 30, 7 p.m.

St. Luke's Episcopal Church
73 South Fullerton Ave.

Program includes "A Midsummer Night's Dream Overture and Nocturne," by Mendelssohn; "Macbeth Prelude and Ballet Music," by Verdi; "Much Ado about Nothing Suite," by Korngold, and "Romeo and Juliet," by Tchaikovsky.

Tickets and more information at montclairorchestra.org, or call 973-435-2906.

By GWEN OREL
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"A Shakespeare Evening" is not your usual orchestral concert: in between selections of music inspired by Shakespeare, actors will perform scenes from Shakespeare plays. David Chan, conductor and artistic director of the Montclair Orchestra, said he has not seen a concert done this way before, though he is sure some have been.

The opening concert for MO's second season will present four pieces of music inspired by Shakespeare plays, performed by a 70-piece orchestra, with scenes from those plays performed by professional and student actors.

The idea for the blend of genres began with the music. After Chan chose two pieces for the concert, he

decided to make a whole evening of music inspired by Shakespeare, or created for Shakespeare plays.

The concert was on the short side, and instead of finding another piece to flesh out the evening, Chan thought of finding local actors to read from each part.



David Chan rehearses with Montclair Orchestra.

“It will flesh it out, and express a union of the arts,” he said. More than 20,000 pieces of music have been written based on Shakespeare plays, Chan continued. Of the pieces that will be performed on Sunday, only one, from Verdi’s “Macbeth,” has text that goes with them: the others are incidental music or concert pieces.

“I thought, why not bring the words that inspired them back into the mix?” Chan said.

It’s not the first time Montclair Orchestra has incorporated spoken word into their concerts. Last season’s “A Study in Contrasts” featured Bob Feinberg of Montclair Film and Melissa Walker of Jazz House Kids. Other arts organizations have worked with MO too: another concert collaborated with Sharron Miller, of Sharron Miller’s Academy for the Performing Arts.

And the posters for this season, MO’s second, have been created by members of Studio Montclair. Amy Whitman created “Musical Shakespeare,” the image used in MO’s posters and publicity materials, chosen by a panel including MO board members. The original will be displayed at the concert.

All of these connections with Montclair organizations are “a way to connect the dots,” Chan said.

Board members Amy Myers and Kelly McDonald helped reach out to the actors. Myers has a background in production and casting. Myers said that she and McDonald worked hard to organize the rehearsals, and make sure it comes together for the audience.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

One of the things that Montclair Orchestra takes pride in is that its orchestra presents seasoned professionals alongside talented students.

Montclair resident Geoffrey Owens, who founded the Brooklyn Shakespeare Company, and is well known for his role on “The Cosby Show,” will be joined by professionals Colin Ryan, of the Royal National Theatre Summer Acting Program, and Pamela Kahl, a member of Stratford Upon Duncan in Jersey City. Student performers are drawn from Montclair High’s School of Visual and Performing Arts alumni: Aaron Drill, a recent graduate of Emerson College; Vivian Belosky, a recent graduate of the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire in the UK, and Sophia Seidenberg, currently a senior at Barnard College. Seidenberg, who is an executive board member of Columbia University’s King’s Crown Shakespeare Troupe, reached out to the other SVPA alumni.

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"I love that Montclair Orchestra has this mission of mixing students and professionals, not



SOPHIA SEIDENBERG

only because it gives students amazing opportunities, but also the professionals have a lot to learn working with students," Seidenberg said.

She will play Titania in a scene from "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and a witch in "Macbeth." When she plays Shakespeare roles that have been around for hundreds of years, she finds herself interacting not only with the character, but also with the actors who have performed her. "It's a cool way to connect with people in the present, and people in the past," she said. "It's everyone's version of the same thing." At SVPA, she learned the joy of collaboration to share theater and community: "Ultimately the reason why we all do theater is to share the work and have fun."

MO's mission to connect younger artists with established ones also excited Colin Ryan. "It's great to meet new folks passionate about Shakespeare," Ryan said. He will play Puck in "A Midsummer Night's Dream;" Benedick in "Much Ado about Nothing;" and Seyton in "Macbeth."

He's especially excited to play Puck, because, unusually for a Shakespearean actor, he's never performed in "Midsummer." Ryan said with a laugh that he's probably the only



COLIN RYAN

person who's performed in "Coriolanus" and "Troilus and Cressida," but not "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

And, he said, he's excited for the pairing of the music with the text.

"Music in general has a long-standing artistic dialogue with the world of Shakespeare," Ryan said. "This is an exciting way to bridge two worlds, and overlap in terms of appeal." Shakespeare's language is "unparalleled," he said. "Shakespeare was constitutionally incapable of writing a two-dimensional character. Even small roles have interesting shades of nuance, and reflect humanity in a way that still touches us over 400 years later."

“Although specific aspects of their lives are not ours anymore, they have human emotions, thoughts and fears we all can relate to.”

And though Shakespearean actors may have done “three ‘Romeo and Juliets,’ six ‘Midsummers,’ it’s important to remember it’s always someone’s first time. To get those magic hooks into someone, to be responsible for that, is a privilege and a responsibility.”

For David Chan the sum of the concert will be more than its parts. “It will be a discovery for all of us,” he said. “I’m eager to see how it works.” With the momentum of the orchestra’s successful first season, he hopes to reach further into the community, and deepen MO’s educational mission: “I hope that more people climb aboard the train.”



Pianist Allison Franzetti rehearses with the Montclair Orchestra.