

# The Detroit News

## Chamber fest keeps artform alive with classics, new pieces

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Chris Felcyn *Special to The Detroit News*

On a June evening in 1994, before an expectant crowd of music-lovers, the regal strains of Paul Dukas' "Fanfare from La Peri" filled the sanctuary of Temple Beth-El. The first Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival was under way.

That inaugural season consisted of a half dozen concerts split between a couple of suburban venues. Now, as it wraps up its 20th year this weekend, the GLCMF has bloomed into a 15-day extravaganza showcasing international artists in 21 concerts at 10 separate venues, from Grosse Pointe to Brighton, from southwest Detroit and Windsor to Ann Arbor.



Festival Artistic Director James Tocco is also a performer.  
(Hart Hollman)

As Artistic Director James Tocco puts it in the festival's program booklet, "We've come a long way!" Indeed they have. And underlying it all has been the festival's unwavering artistic mission: a full court press advocacy for chamber music in all its forms, and all its times, from beloved classics to world premieres.

Tonight at St. Hugo's for example, a Beethoven trio [shares](#) the program with William Bolcom, a Pulitzer Prize, Grammy-winning, living composer who will be on hand to perform his own work.

If pianist and Artistic Director Tocco can be considered the architect of the GLCMF, then trombonist and Executive Director Maury Okun might be considered its builder.

"I think our esthetic has always been to keep pushing and pushing because we don't want to be a museum," Okun says. "We want to play a role in advancing the art form and to be one of the leading advocates for that in the community, and James is absolutely as committed to that today as he was 20 years ago."

It's a commitment that's played an important role in creating new music, new musicians and, very importantly, edge-of-your-seat performances.

Cellist Andrés Díaz is a veteran world-class musician and no stranger to challenging repertoire. Just last weekend he was involved in GLCMF performances of Alfred Schnittke's ferociously challenging 1978 cello sonata, a work that Díaz **calls** "just a monster piece. Very, very moving. Very, very powerful. Every time I play that piece, about halfway through the second movement I think, 'I don't think I'm going to make it.' It's very physical."

"Have you ever not made it?" he's asked.

"No, but everything hurts when I finish." That sort of total **investment** in the music is another key component in the festival's success.

"So much about contemporary music is about how it's presented," points out Okun. "When you bring great players and they play the piece with great conviction, and there's a lot of energy around it, people respond to it very positively."

"If you'd asked me would I have imagined this 20 years ago, I would've said, 'You gotta be kidding.' It's certainly evolved in an incredible way, and we think it's got at least another 20 great years to go."

## **Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival**

### **Beethoven and Bolcom**

7:30 p.m. Tonight

Tickets \$40

St. Hugo of the Hills Catholic Church

2215 Opdyke, Bloomfield Hills

### **Claremont Trio, Members of Parker Quartet**

7 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. Friday

Free with museum admission (\$4-\$8 ages 6-17, free for residents of Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties)

Detroit Institute of Arts

5200 Woodward, Detroit

### **Closing Night: Rhapsody in Blue**

8 p.m. Saturday

Tickets \$40

Seligman Performing Arts Center at Detroit Country Day School

22305 W. 13 Mile (at Lahser), Beverly Hills

(248) 559-2097

[greatlakeschambermusic.org](http://greatlakeschambermusic.org)

*Hear freelance writer Chris Felcyn's interview with Maury Okun today at 3 p.m. on WRCJ-FM (90.9).*