

Peter Schickele debuts new work at Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival

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P.D.Q. Bach, left, is the creation of professor Peter Schickele. (Peter Schaaf)

He's best known for discovering P.D.Q. Bach, but there's more to Professor Peter Schickele than the whimsical output of his very popular (and fictitious) alter-ego.

Like the time he shot fellow-composer Philip Glass. But we'll get to that later.

Schickele is composer-in-residence for the 21st annual Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival, which opens this weekend and runs from June 14-29 at venues all over Metro Detroit. The festival's theme this year is "In the Shadow of Bach," as in Johann Sebastian, the alleged father of P.D.Q.

The festival will include several of Schickele's original compositions, including his Piano Quintet No. 2 and the world premiere of his Pastorale for flute and strings featuring DSO principal flutist David Buck.

The Pastorale grew out of an experiment on "Schickele Mix," a typically unconventional project he produced for public radio.

"For one of the programs, I decided it would be nice to write a piece during the program, so people could really see the kind of thinking that went in to writing a piece. I cheated a little bit, I took longer than an hour to do it, but this is the piece that started that way."

Though he turns 79 next month, Schickele's schedule as composer, performer and educator keeps him well occupied.

"I've got a nice life," he says. "I've got as many commissions as I can handle for the Peter Schickele music, as well as the P.D.Q. Bach, and we're going to be doing some of both during the festival.

"I'm working now on a piece for clarinet and string quartet commissioned by David Shifrin, who's one of the very best clarinetists in the whole country. I'm very excited about that."

Meanwhile, Schickele's work on the oeuvre of P.D.Q. Bach continues.

"Oh, I think something may come up," he says. "P.D.Q. Bach is the only dead composer who can still be commissioned."

Schickele had a memorable stint at the prestigious Juilliard School in Manhattan. Once, while teaching fourth year ear training, Schickele's ingenuity as an educator was tested.

"Sometimes in the spring, teenagers getting out of school would come by and shout obscenities into the window," he remembers. "There was not much you could do, you just sort of waited for them to get tired and go on. One year I noticed that in this drug store there was a big display of water pistols. And I thought

at the risk of starting a rumble I would be prepared if those guys came by again. So before the class I filled up the water pistol and put it in my pocket. The kids never came by and I completely forgot about it.”

“At the end of the class I was saying, ‘Now I’m going to give you the exercises for which you’ll be responsible in the final exam.’ And this organist in the front row said, ‘OK, shoot.’ And I said, ‘What did you say?’ He said, ‘Shoot,’ and I shot at him, but he ducked.”

And it was at that moment that Philip Glass, future composer of “Einstein on the Beach” was shot by Peter Schickele, the future composer of “Einstein on the Fritz.”

Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival

Saturday-June 29 at venues throughout Metro Detroit

Pastorale for flute and strings by Peter Schickele — world premiere

7:30 p.m. June 19

10:45 a.m. June 20

Temple Beth El

7400 Telegraph, Bloomfield Hills

Tickets \$35 regular;

\$10 (younger than 25)

(248) 559-2097

greatlakeschambermusic.org

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