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Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival unites gifted musicians

Chris Felcyn *Special to The Detroit News*



The Pacifica Quartet: Brandon Vamos, cello, left; Masumi Per Rostad, viola; Simin Ganatra, violin; and Sibbi Bernhardsson, violin (Saverio Truglia)

Now entering its 20th year, the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival has grown to become one of the nation's premier summer celebrations of classical music, its programs acclaimed for their breadth and originality.

This year's events run from Saturday to June 23, at 10 venues across the metro area. Among the artists appearing at this year's festival are pianist Jeremy Denk, cellist Robert deMaine, eighth blackbird, cellist Paul Katz, the Claremont Trio and the Pacifica Quartet.

Good festivals offer unique benefits to music lovers on both sides of the stage. “I love being in a string quartet,” says Sibbi Bernhardsson, a violinist with the Grammy-winning Pacifica Quartet. “Musically it’s in many ways the ideal career path for me. Some of the greatest repertoire written was for string quartets. But we live very much in our own little quartet world and it’s hard often to just run into other musicians, so when we go to festivals it’s incredibly inspiring and fun and just enriching to see all these other musicians and get to play with (them).”

Just such an enriching opportunity will present itself Saturday evening on the opening night program of this year’s Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival. That concert at the Seligman Center in Beverly Hills will include a performance of Antonin Dvorak’s A major piano quintet with the Pacifica joining with pianist Jonathan Biss.

Ironically, though Biss was born and raised in Bloomington, where the Pacifica is quartet-in-residence at Indiana [University](#), this will be the first time they’ve all played together.

“We’ve been actually hoping and trying to make a collaboration work with him for a few years,” Bernhardsson explains, “but our schedules have never quite meshed.”

Maury Okun, GLCF executive director, says one of the nice things for the festival organizers is being able to bring together high-caliber artists. “It’s one of the reasons why both of them are interested in coming.”

Okun can take pride in observing Pacifica’s growing success over the years. The quartet first appeared here some 15 years ago as participants in the Great Lakes Festival’s Shouse Institute.

It’s named after Catherine Filene Shouse, the passionate arts patron who, in addition to setting up the institute that bears her name (and many other projects), donated her [family](#) farm to the U.S. government to become what is now the Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts near Washington, D.C.

Clearly the members of the Pacifica Quartet have done a pretty good job of figuring things out since their Shouse Institute days. But why is the quartet-in-residence at the relatively landlocked Indiana University named after the globe’s largest ocean?

“Well, the quartet started out on the west coast in ’94,” explains Bernhardsson. “We named ourselves after the Pacific Ocean. But within a few months of the quartet’s existence we got a little job in Chicago. It was just enough basically to pay our rent, but it really [enabled](#) us to start rehearsing and being a quartet.

At that point, we didn’t want to change the name so now I think it only makes sense,” he says with a twinkle in his eye, “because we’re all great pacifists.”

Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival

Pacifica Quartet

■8 p.m. Saturday

Tickets \$40

Seligman Performing Arts Center at Detroit Country Day School

22305 W. 13 Mile (at Lahser),

Beverly Hills

■3 p.m. Sunday

Tickets \$35

Grosse Pointe Unitarian Church

17150 Maumee, Grosse Pointe

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greatlakeschambermusic.org

Hear freelancer Chris Felcyn's interview with violinist Sibbi Bernhardsson today at 3 p.m. on WRCJ-FM (90.9).