

the scene

...on the Semiahmoo Peninsula

2019-2020 schedule already set

Cello octet rounds out White Rock Concerts season

Alex Browne
Staff reporter

White Rock Concerts concluding presentation for the current season, this Friday, April 12, will be notable on several counts.

Series subscribers can count themselves fortunate they have tickets to O-Celli – a bravura cello octet direct from Belgium.

And series artistic directors

Elizabeth and Marcel Bergmann will also be formally announcing the upcoming 2019-2020 season, including appearances by British cellist Colin Carr, The St. Lawrence String Quartet, Vancouver's celebrated Turning Point Ensemble, violinist Mark Fewer, a cappella vocal ensemble Musica Intima, pianist Charles Richard-Hemelin and the Montrose Trio.

The concert – featuring a wildly varied program of eight-cello arrangements of pieces ranging from Verdi, Tchaikovsky and Manuel De Falla to Strauss, Piazzolla and Nino Roti – takes place at 7:30 p.m. at the series' usual venue, White Rock Baptist Church, 1657 140 St.

O-Celli are making their current round of appearances in B.C. –

including the White Rock concert – courtesy of government agency Wallonie - Bruxelles International, which supports creators and entrepreneurs from the Wallonia and Brussels region participating in international co-operative projects.

"We just heard they're laying out 16 airfares," said series founder and artistic director emeritus George Zukerman. "Eight people and eight

cellos – each of which occupy a seat!"

The cello octet – virtually unknown in the traditional classical repertoire outside of Villa-Lobos' early 20th century *Bachianas Brasilieras No. 5*, scored for soprano and eight cellos – has become a fast-expanding genre, Zukerman noted.

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'20 years ago, we couldn't have presented a string quartet'

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"There's a proliferation of them in Europe – in Berlin, London, Paris, Dresden, Moscow and Sofia – even as far afield as Kuwait," he said.

This is, no doubt, due to the flexibility, versatility and range of the cello in the right hands, he agreed, and the dynamic and expressive potential of a number of them all together.

"Playing in the upper register, they can sound like violins, but they are also able, at the other end of the range, to sound like a double bass," he said, adding that the members of the ensemble are all "top young players of a number of ensembles."

Principal cellist and leader Sebastien Walnier is also principal cello of Brussels' Orchester de la Monnaie, for example, while other members include Walnier's co-soloist in that orchestra (Corinna



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O-Celli will showcase the dynamic potential of an all-cello ensemble this Friday.

Lardin); the cello soloists for the Royal Philharmonic of Liege (Jean-Pierre Borboux), the Pamplona Orchestra (Herwig Coryn), the

Klassische Philharmonie Bonn (Shio Nishimura) and the Opera of Wallonia (Jorin Jorden), plus distinguished freelance soloist

Alexander Beauvoir and Paris Opera cellist Yoori Lee.

The concert will also highlight the continuing success of the traditionally sold-out series, a cultural mainstay of the Semiahmoo Peninsula since it was first established by Zukerman in 1956.

Current subscribing members – some 700 Peninsula residents – have until May 31 to renew their subscriptions, after which they are offered to those on the current waitlist and the general public, and Zukerman is confident that the series will be between 85 and 90 per cent sold-out by Friday's concert.

But that doesn't mean it isn't worth it for potential subscribers to register, he added.

"Usually around 10 per cent of subscribers drop out each year," he said. "For legitimate reasons – including death."

He also has no doubt about the series' durability in the sure-guiding hands of the Bergmanns, and the White Rock Concerts audience's ability to adapt to and embrace different and sometimes challenging music styles.

"Several concerts ago, the Cantata Singers presented a program and I was deeply concerned – it was an all-contemporary, wild modern program. I thought it wouldn't fly, but the audience put me in my place. It was magnificent – we all sat there open-jawed. (Director) Paula Kremer played on her choir as if it were a precious instrument..."

"Some 20 years ago, we couldn't have presented a string quartet – now we get complaints if we don't have one. The reality is, if you do something well, it will work."

For more information on the series, visit whiterockconcerts.com