December 10, 2021

A McCarter Cornucopia of Holiday Music for Every Audience!

Bach’s Complete Brandenburgs

If McCarter has a musical event that has become almost a tradition, it’s this presentation of all six of Bach’s dazzling, uplifting Brandenburg Concertos, which seem uniquely suited to these pandemic times (Thursday, December 16th). The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center inaugurated this holiday festival in 1993, and it has become as much a fixture in New York as it has been in Princeton, whether at Richardson Auditorium or this year, at McCarter itself. And if you need proof that absolute music has a place in year-end celebrations, there is no better example than this collection of concerti grossi which bursts with moment-to-moment buoyancy. Bach’s particular genius was in taking the typical form of a concerto grosso in which strings share soloist duties with a larger group of musicians and adding brass and winds, especially flute and trumpet. It takes at least 20 players to do the Brandenburgs justice; the CMSLC forces include many players who are virtuosi in their own right, but who collaborate as Bach intended, to make music that is at once joyous and festive for the season.

Concerts Coming to McCarter:

Igor Levit, piano / January 11th
  Beethoven: Sonata No. 30
  Schubert: Six Moments Musicaux
  Wagner: Prelude from Tristan und Isolde
  Liszt: Sonata in B minor

Jennifer Koh, violin / February 18
  Thomas Sauer, piano
  Beethoven: Sonatas No. 1 & 9 (Kreutzer)
  Vijay Iyer: Bridgetower Fantasy

Seong-Jin Cho, piano / Monday, March 7
  Janacek: Sonata No. 1.X.1905
  Ravel: Gaspard de la Nuit
  Chopin: The Four Scherzos
What becomes a legend most? Well, for almost 50 years, Sweet Honey in the Rock (Friday December 17th) more than qualifies, and this year’s concert will be its 15th at McCarter since 1989 -- a mark in our own record book. To call Sweet Honey a “collective” is a misnomer and scarcely does justice to what this quintet of singers really represent: musical missionaries and ambassadors of a cappella excellence, celebrating the human voice with devotion to empowerment, education, activism and -- in the process -- entertainment. Their music not only pays homage to their kindred sisters (including Miriam Makeba, whose voice and vision are celebrated in McCarter’s forthcoming presentation of Dreaming Zenzile, starting January 15) but also incorporates gospel, world, and folk roots with elements of R&B, jazz, and even hip-hop. Their socially and politically conscious approach to the issues of today have been a trademark of Sweet Honey’s music, but at the same time, their songs are always imbued with messages of optimism, faith, and pride itself. Founded in 1993 by Bernice Johnson Reagon – an iconic figure in my career – Sweet Honey’s vocal message is dedicated to diversity, and is still delivered by two of its founding members, Carol Maillard and Louise Robinson, joined by Aisha Kahlil, Nitanju Bolade Casel, Rochelle Rice and musician Romeir Mendez, plus ASL-interpreter Barbara Hunt. If you need to sum up a Sweet Honey experience in one sentence: it’s music to stir the mind and soul; at this time of year, what more could be more appropriate?

—William L. Lockwood, Jr.
Director of Special Programming