

~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

Gold Coast Chamber starts 2020 with 'Czech Marks' concert



Photo Alicia Gholami

Pamela Freund-Striplen with the members of the San Francisco Piano Trio: German violinist Axel Strauss, French cellist Jean-Michel Fonteneau, and American pianist Jeffrey Sykes.

By Sophie Braccini

There is a special relationship between the Czech Republic and Lamorinda. First the active sister-city relationship between Orinda and Tabor, then the very successful annual Czech-centered concert in Lafayette curated by Pamela Freund-Striplen and her Gold Coast Chamber Players.

The violinist confesses that if she had a favorite musician it would be Antonín Dvořák, and because her love of the 19th century composer is met with equal enthusiasm year after year by her audi-

ence, the next GCCP concert, on Jan. 25, called "Czech Marks," will feature works by Dvořák and two composers influenced by him. Freund-Striplen believes that the program will be a lighthearted journey with a fairy tale quality that will be very well received. She will be playing with the San Francisco Piano Trio.

The chamber music collective director becomes lyrical when she talks about Dvořák, his fantastic spirit, the influence of folk music in his composition, and how he is just a great chamber music composer. This year Freund-

Striplen is proposing for the first time in Lafayette the Czech composer's Piano Quartet No.1, Op. 23 for Violin, Viola, Cello, and Piano. He wrote the first of his two piano quartets, Op. 23, at the age of 34, and the Czech media of the time is said to have recognized and appreciated the Slavic spirit that dominated this new creation.

Freund-Striplen says that Moravian folk music is very present in this first piano quartet, giving it a fantastic vibe.

To compose that night's program the director has chosen to add Leoš Janáček's

Sonata for Violin and Piano and Vítězslav Novák's Piano Quintet Op. 12, for Piano and String Quartet. Novák was one of Dvořák's students in Prague and he began teaching there at the turn of the 20th century. The specific piece presented in Lafayette is both very romantic and influenced by the folk art of his native land. Novák influenced in turn a whole generation of Czech composers in the 20th century. Janáček had a similar approach, collecting Moravian folk songs and being inspired by them to produce his music. He did considerable work incorporating the inflection of his native language into his music. The sonata presented by the GCCP was written at the beginning of World War I. Janáček said that in that piece he could just about hear the sound of the steel clashing.

Freund-Striplen is not Czech herself; she traces her ancestry to Budapest, and Eastern European music and

especially Czech, resonates with her. She has once again invited the San Francisco Piano Trio, Axel Strauss, Jean-Michel Fonteneau, and Jeffrey Sykes, to play with her in this ambitious program. The GCCP artistic director describes the three musicians as dedicated, passionate teachers, generous of spirit and wonderfully collaborative performers. Liana Bérubé from Québec and former student of Strauss will join as second violinist.

This year marks GCCP's 20th season and as Freund-Striplen has deepened her roots in Lafayette, more community partners are getting involved with her work, such as Jennifer Perlmutter (Lafayette gallery owner and Business Person of the Year), working together to make Lafayette and Lamorinda a vibrant artistic center in the East Bay.

More information and tickets can be found online at www.gccpmusic.com.

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