



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sept. 16, 2010

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ART AND MUSIC MERGE IN UTOPIA

Walk into almost any school lobby and it's likely to be fairly institutional and plain-looking, with bare walls, cold floors and harsh lighting. But walk into the lobby at the Livingston Manor Central School (LMCS) and it's like time-travelling to a past century. One look skyward – to the left and to the right of the grand marble central staircases – and it's clear why. Six 19th-century panoramic wallpaper murals, depicting a utopian ideal of America, hang three on each side of the ornate balustrades, surrounded by enormous carved-oak borders, and soaring high above the ground floor.

Taking inspiration from the historic panels, Weekend of Chamber Music (WCM) and the Catskill Art Society (CAS) join forces in a unique concert series and exhibition beginning **Oct. 16** in Livingston Manor, the opening day of "Utopia: the Real and the Ideal in the Pursuit of Social Democracy" at the CAS gallery on Main Street. WCM presents "Music in America: 1780 to 2010," a pair of 'moveable' concerts at 3pm **Oct. 16** and again on **Nov. 6**. The concerts begin in the LMCS lobby, aptly under the Zuber panels for the early music portion of the program; then everyone moves to the nearby CAS gallery, returning to the 21st century for new music in the setting of the contemporary art chosen for the open call exhibition, which continues until Nov. 21.

When art enthusiast and WCM artistic director Judith Pearce first encountered the imposing panels a few years ago, she was struck by how unusual it seemed to find them installed in a very small, rural public school. But the school was built by the Works Progress Administration, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal answer to the Great Depression, and it wasn't unusual for an agency designed to bring hope and renewal to America to integrate the arts into its projects. The school and its Zuber panels opened to the public in 1939, more than 100 years after the idealistic scenes were created.

The panels, titled "Vues d'Amerique du Nord," were designed in 1834 by Jean-Julien Deltil, and block-printed by the renowned Zuber et Cie wallpaper company in France. Close inspection of the works reveal a typical 19th-century European view of America as an ideal and perfect society, where all races and classes of people were imagined to be equal and free. These murals were also installed in the John F. Kennedy White House.

In creating the concert series, Ms. Pearce said, "We agreed that our musical interpretation of "Utopia" should be in the context of music as a significant element of life as it was back then. Looking at the experience of the Europeans who came over to America in the late 18th and 19th centuries, as well as that of America's Founding Fathers, music was crucial to their idea of a utopian society."

American composer Andrew Waggoner created a musical interpretation of the "Vues d'Amerique" for this joint project, commissioned by WCM, and the world premiere of his "5 Singles" is Oct. 16. Of the work Mr. Waggoner says, "As the title suggests, it takes the form of 5 short movements, each with its own character, sound world and emotional tone. The jumping-off point for each was a different painting in the series of varied, sometimes hallucinatory, always imaginative responses to the wonderful Zuber wall panels in the Livingston Manor school ... I love the vitality of these pieces, their unfettered re-imaginings of the originals."

THE CONCERTS

“Music in America: 1780 to 2010”

October 16, 3pm

Flutist Judith Pearce; violinist Sunghae Anna Lim; oboist Matt Sullivan; harpsichordist/fortepianist Kenneth Hamrick and cellist Caroline Stinson.

Part I: Livingston Manor Central School Lobby

Music from Thomas Jefferson’s collection includes Haydn, Corelli, Vivaldi & Hopkinson.

Part II: Catskill Art Society

World premiere of “5 Singles” by Andrew Waggoner; plus music by Steve Reich & Henry Cowell & an improvisation

November 6, 3pm

Baritone Anthony Turner joins the WCM musicians.

Part I: Livingston Manor Central School Lobby

Music by the Chevalier St. Georges, Ignatius Sancho and Francis Johnson.

Part II: Catskill Art Society

Music by William Grant Still, Dorothy Rudd Moore, A. Waggoner, & selected Spirituals.

On Oct. 16, the first half in the school lobby presents music of Haydn, Corelli, Vivaldi and Francis Hopkinson, who called himself “the first Native of the United States who has written a Musical Composition” in the dedication of his “Seven Songs” to George Washington in 1788. The second half of the concert at CAS presents the world premiere of American composer Andrew Waggoner’s “5 Singles,” and music by Steve Reich and Henry Cowell.

On Nov. 6, WCM takes its lead from the Zuber panels’ portrayal of free African Americans in elegant attire engaged in middle-class activities, and from Lucie Dillon’s “Memoirs of Madame de La Tour du Pin.” The early music portion includes works by the Chevalier St. George, Ignatius Sancho and Francis Johnson of Philadelphia, all successfully working black musicians of the time. The second half of the program includes a second performance of Waggoner’s piece, and music by Still, Moore, an improvisation and a selection of Spirituals.

Concert admission is by donation. All seating is first come, first served.

For more concert information, visit WCM at WCMconcerts.org, email info@WCMconcerts.org
or call 845-932-8527.

For more exhibition information, visit CAS at catskillartsociety.org, email info@catskillartsociety.org
or call 845-436-4227.

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Weekend of Chamber Music is a 501(c)3 non-profit, supported in part by public funding from the New York State Council on the Arts, a State agency.