FeNAM features world premieres of American music

With nine world premieres and 20 West Coast premieres, Sacramento State’s 2012 Festival of New American Music promises to be a memorable experience.

This year’s FeNAM runs Nov. 1-10, featuring 20 concerts by various artists, plus a keynote address by renowned composer Augusta Read Thomas to kick off the festival at noon Thursday, Nov. 1.

New American music runs the scale from that influenced by classical art music to music with jazz flavors. As long as it was written after 2000 by an American composer, it qualifies.

FeNAM director Keith Bohm and co-director Stephen Blumberg say Thomas’ music illustrates that variety.

“Her music is very complex but also accessible,” says Blumberg. “It’s hard to describe because different things happen in each of her pieces.”

“Thomas looks to the past, from all musical periods and genres of music, then links them to the present,” Bohm says. “She always keeps the idea of the past in her heart and emotions when writing.”

Third Coast Percussion will perform the West Coast premiere of Thomas’ “Resounding Earth” during its performance at 8 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 1. The piece will cover half of Third Coast’s concert, and do even more for the stage. “They’re flying in a variety of percussion just for this concert,” Bohm says. “The entire stage will be filled with percussion.”

The JACK Quartet will perform the West Coast premiere of Michelle Lou’s, “Porcupine,” winner of the 2012 Finale National Composition Contest. “JACK Quartet is one of the hottest string quartets on the planet right now,” says Bohm. The JACK Quartet concert is at 8 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 3.

Other performers include the Calliope Duo, Citywater, and the Travis Brass from the U.S. Air Force Band of the Golden West.

Sac State musicians will be well represented during the festival. Professor Laurel Zucker, flute, will present two world premieres of her own music at 4 p.m. Monday, Nov.
5, and Rootstock Percussion, playing at 8 p.m. Monday, Nov. 5, features Professor Daniel Kennedy. Stephen Blumberg has written a new piece, “Desert Rains,” that will be premiered by Sac State instructors David Wells on bassoon, and Sandra McPherson on clarinet, at 8 p.m. Friday, Nov. 9. The Faculty Jazz Combo will join jazz guitarist Mark Elf at noon Saturday, Nov. 3; and the Symphonic Wind Ensemble will perform with trumpeter Allen Vizzutti at 8 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 7.

Another thread running through FeNAM this year is the observance of the 100th anniversary of composer John Cage’s birth. Cage’s work was the prelude to the development of new American music and most performances will include one of his pieces. “We’re celebrating his centennial that way, rather than having one full concert dedicated to his work,” Bohm says. “That’s a little more interesting and creates more variety for our audience.”

For more information on FeNAM, visit www.csus.edu/music/fenam/ or call the Music Department at (916) 278-5191. To hear music from the festival’s opening act, Third Coast Percussion, visit http://bit.ly/Py5ShU. For media assistance, call Sacramento State’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156.

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