FeNAM highlights range of ‘new American music’

Music by renowned movie composers. A trio of women playing music by women composers. Avant-garde musicians on piano and percussion. They’re all part of Sacramento State’s Festival of New American Music (FeNAM), a 10-day series of free concerts, master classes and composer forums.

This year’s celebration runs Nov. 1-10 and features composer Christopher Theofinidas as the keynote speaker.

FeNAM (http://bit.ly/tKAksj) spotlights new American music, the broad category of music that was written after 2000 by American composers, and that includes influences of classical art music, jazz and experimental approaches.

The selection of Theofinidas was something of a departure this year, according to FeNAM directors Keith Bohm and Stephen Blumberg. Usually they select a speaker and then approach the performers about including that person’s works in their performances. This year, they looked at what the acts were including in their programs and saw a number of works by Theofinidas, so they approached him.

“We’re maybe going in a different direction with this keynote speaker,” Bohm says. “A lot of people say he writes quite lyrical music.”

The acclaimed composer has written considerable music for orchestras and choruses, along with some operas. “His style is very traditional in many ways, but it’s really vibrant,” Blumberg says.

Theofinidas will deliver his keynote address at noon Tuesday, Nov. 5, in the Music Recital Hall.

One of the performers, pianist Gloria Cheng, has a program that’s a change of pace from her usual repertoire.
“She’s really an avant-garde pianist who plays really wild works,” says Bohm. “But here she’ll be doing all world premieres by movie composers.” These will all be new pieces written especially for Cheng by the likes of John Williams, Randy Newman and Bruce Broughton, who wrote the music for films such as “Silverado,” “Tombstone” and the television program “JAG.” Cheng’s performance takes place at 8 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 6, in the Music Recital Hall.

Approaching music with an unconventional ear is Yarn/Wire, comprising two pianists and two percussionists. “You’re going to get quite a percussive effect from the pianos,” Bohm says.

Yarn/Wire’s concert is at 8 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 2. The group will also take part in the Gala Performance with Citywater and the McAllister Keller Guitar Duo at 8 p.m. Friday, Nov. 1. Both performances are in the Music Recital Hall.

Saxophonist Timothy McAllister performs at 8 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 9, in the Music Recital Hall with Liz Ames on the piano. “As a virtuoso saxophonist, you can’t do any better than him,” says Bohm.

FeNAM is also a time for Sacramento State’s music students and faculty to shine. Flautist Laurel Zucker will perform with guitarist Mark Delpriora at 8 p.m. Monday, Nov. 4. The Student Artists Performance Competition takes place at 4 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 7. The Student Composers Competition is at 4 p.m. Friday, Nov. 8. Pianist Richard Cionco will have a new composition performed by the Festival Ensemble – comprising faculty and special guests – at 8 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 7. And Citywater and the trio Vox n Plux will premiere some of Blumberg’s new works at 8 p.m. Friday, Nov. 1, and 8 p.m. Friday, Nov. 8.

While most of the focus is on the campus Music Recital Hall, the festival has events at other venues, such as the University Union and Sacramento City College.

On FeNAM’s last day, Allegresse, a trio of women on flute, oboe and piano, will perform a program of music by women composers at 3 p.m. at the Crocker Art Museum in conjunction with the museum’s exhibition on women’s struggles and empowerment. Museum admission is required for that concert.

FeNAM is unique among similar festivals in that it offers its concerts for free. Bohm and Blumberg point out that would not be possible without the understanding of
the musicians, the generosity of grant funders and the unwavering support of the College of Arts and Letters and Sacramento State.

“Ten days long and in its 36th year – this really is one of the longest and longest-running festivals in the country devoted to new music,” Blumberg says.

For more information about FeNAM, call the Music Department at (916) 278-5191. For media assistance, call Sac State’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156.

– Craig Koscho

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