

CLASSICAL NOTES

San Francisco's Del Sol Quartet celebrates with 'craft music'

A quarter-century after its first performance, the Del Sol Quartet is still expanding its musical

boundaries. Founded in 1992 by violinist Charlton Lee, the San Francisco-based string quartet has built a thriving reputation as one of the Bay



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Area's most adventurous champions of new works by living composers.

This weekend, the quartet — violinists Benjamin Kreith and Rick Shinozaki, violist Lee, and cellist Kathryn Bates — celebrates its 25th anniversary with three distinctive programs. The Whole Sol Festival, presented today through Saturday at the Taube Atrium Theater, features music by composers Terry Riley, Gyan Riley, Gabriela Lena Frank and a number of others who are writing for the quartet right now.

"A big part of our mission is to continue the tradition of new music," Lee remarked in a recent interview, "a tradition that goes back not just to Europe but all over the world.

"People always ask, 'What kind of music do you play?' and I hate the word 'classical' — it's like the worst misnomer. We've started using the term 'craft music,' because it entices people to ask what it means — if you say 'classical' they get the wrong idea right away. Right now, everybody's into craft beer, craft food, so the idea is small batches, music made by individuals who put a lot of care into their craft.



MATTHEW WASHBURN — DEL SOL QUARTET

San Francisco's Del Sol Quartet celebrates its 25th anniversary of performing contemporary classical music with a series of concerts today through Saturday.

These pieces require a tremendous amount of time and craft from us to bring them to life. Beyond that, the boundaries are wide open. We're playing with different tuning systems, with folk traditions, with different ways of playing our instruments."

Indeed, this weekend's festival is a showcase for varied approaches to the string quartet sound. Tonight's program includes an appearance by acclaimed Bay Area composer Terry Riley; the group will play Riley's "Dark Queen Mantra," written for Del Sol and Riley's son, Gyan Riley, who joins the quartet on electric guitar. Del Sol premiered the work in 2015; it's the title cut of the group's latest CD on the Sono Luminus label. The program also includes Terry Riley's "G Song" and his "The Wheel and Mythic Birds Waltz," and "Mas Lugares" by Stefano Scodanibbio.

Friday's program, titled "It's Our Party," features music by Ben Johnston, Erberk Eryilmaz, Theresa Wong and Daniel Wohl. Highlighting the eve-

ning is Gyan Riley's "Vernal," a new audience participation piece composed for string quartet and ukulele choir. "Gyan will play ukulele solo, the audience is the choir, and we'll be involved," Lee says with a chuckle, adding that ukulele players are encouraged to sign up on Del Sol's website and attend a run-through an hour before showtime. "It's a fun piece," he says. "It's kind of hard to make a sad ukulele song."

The festival wraps Saturday with a program featuring Gabriela Lena Frank. Del Sol was one of the first Bay Area groups to play the composer-performer's music, which is often inspired by her Peruvian roots; the lineup includes Frank's "Kanto Kechua" and a new piece she's written for Lee and Bates. Frank also will join the Del Sol players in her piano quintet. Completing the program is a world premiere by another of Lee's favorite composers, Hesam Abedini.

Like many Bay Area musicians, Lee, a Berkeley native, notes that success in the performing arts is hard-

won. Del Sol weathered some hard times — "periods where we were all freelancing, trying to make things work," he says.

"But I feel blessed that I've been able to stay, that the group has been able to hang on through rough times and really enjoy the bright moments. We're getting national and international recognition; composers are aware of us, and we're doing interesting projects. We don't blast through a lot of new pieces — we like to do less, build new repertoire, really go in deep."

Details: Whole Sol Festival, 8 p.m. today-Saturday; Taube Atrium Theater, 401 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco; \$25-\$75; www.delsolquartet.com.

"TURANDOT" RETURNS »

San Francisco Opera opened the fall season with "Turandot," featuring soprano Martina Serafin in the title role. This weekend, the company returns to Puccini's final masterpiece with several significant cast changes. Swedish soprano Nina Stemme, who last appeared here in 2011 as Brünnhilde in Wagner's "Ring" cycle, returns as Turandot; soprano Leah Crocetto sings Liù, a role she first performed for the company in 2011. Bass Solomon Howard makes his company debut as Timur. Conductor Christopher Franklin — another S.F. Opera debut — leads six performances.

Details: Saturday-Dec. 9, War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco; \$26-\$398; 415-864-3330; www.sfopera.com.

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