

# San Jose Mercury News

Sunday, April 25, 2010

## Music@Menlo: A tradition at 8

Festival to feature edgy chamber works



TRISTAN COOK

Music@Menlo artistic directors David Finckel and Wu Han in concert.

**By Richard Scheinin**  
[rscheinin@mercurynews.com](mailto:rscheinin@mercurynews.com)

The Music@Menlo chamber music festival by now is something of a tradition on the Peninsula. It returns this summer for its eighth season, July 23-Aug. 14, once again gathering dozens of the best chamber players in the United States on the greensward campus of the Menlo School in Atherton for performances there and at close-by venues — generally filled to the gills by audiences

swept away by the spirit of the festival.

While many Silicon Valley endeavors have suffered in recent years, this one — a true startup, when it first got going — has actually gathered momentum.

Of course, each season one can debate the successfulness of one concert program or another. But there's not much getting around the fact that Menlo has created a special hot-

See **MENLO**, Page 2



# Menlo

*Continued from Page 1*

house atmosphere: great players eager to perform in intimate venues, building connections (and real friendships) with listeners in a setting of intellectual excitement, with multimedia lectures, casual cafe conversations and more performances by the exceptional young players (ages 9-29) who attend the festival's institute.

"It's a miracle, I have to say," remarks pianist Wu Han, who cofounded and codirects the festival with her husband, cellist David Finckel. (Back home in New York, they are co-artistic directors of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.) "Here we are in our eighth year — pretty soon we'll be heading toward our 10th anniversary — and I think we have created a really important community through the festival. I cannot find a more intelligent and passionate audience anywhere. And the musicians love it; you come out here, and you just feel inspired."

This year's festival is titled "Maps and Legends"

— tickets are available now — and revolves around seven core concert programs, all but one (on opening night) tethered to a specific time (or timeline) and place. Wu Han, who was in Atherton earlier this month to meet with Menlo staff and patrons, sat down in a local cafe and talked about the festival, boasting that it is "much more edgy" than in past summers.

She pointed to the July 23 opening concert at the new Menlo-Atherton High School Performing Arts Center. Titled "The Seasons," it launches the festival with Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons," a total chestnut. But Vivaldi is paired with visionary American composer George Crumb's "Music for a Summer Evening (Makrokosmos III)," for two amplified pianos and an array of percussion: "In one movement," Wu Han says, "a toy whistle is played directly into the piano — sounds straight from Crumb's imagination, the most glorious sonic effects."

Pianist Gilbert Kalish, a legend and a festival regular (who turns 75 this summer), will perform this work of teeming atmospherics with Wu Han and percussionists Christopher Froh and

Ayano Kataoka. Kalish was taught the piece by Crumb. He premiered it in 1974, and now has taught it to Wu Han.

Other programs include "Vienna" (July 31-Aug. 2), charting the development in that city "of a specific Germanic musical language," as Wu Han puts it, from Haydn through Beethoven, Brahms and Schoenberg.

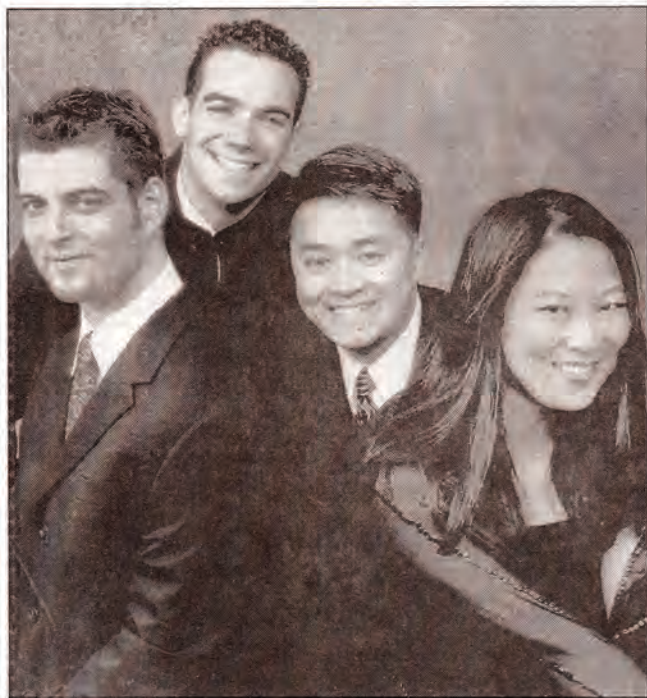
"Aftermath: 1945" (Aug. 4-5) includes Richard Strauss' "Metamorphosen" (performed in its original string septet form), his powerful response to the 1945 carpet bombing of Dresden. Composed in 1945, it is coupled with Dmitri Shostakovich's String Quartet No. 8 in C minor, composed in Dresden 15 years later and dedicated to the memory of victims of fascism and war — and performed at Menlo by the superb Miró Quartet. The program concludes with Benjamin Britten's "The Holy Sonnets of John Donne," another response, from 1945, to the calamity of World War II.

"La Ville-Lumiere: Paris, 1920-28" (Aug. 7) will fly through works by Milhaud, Copland, Antheil, Prokofiev, Fauré, Ravel, Poulenc and Gershwin — all living in the City of Lights during that heady period.

As the festival's co-artistic directors, Wu Han and Finckel have again fashioned a cross-section of players on the national and even international scene, from young up-and-comers to venerated elders.

The 2010 crop of violinists includes such veterans as Philip Setzer (widely known as a member of the Emerson String Quartet, which also includes Finckel), Jorja Fleezanis and Ani Kavafian, alongside such upstarts as Arnaud Sussman, Lily Francis and Erin Keefe. Aside from Wu Han and Kalish, pianists include a hit parade of mid-career virtuosos (i.e. Jeffrey Kahane) and 30-something stars-in-the-making (Inon Barnatan and Alessio Bax).

Every year, the festival rounds out its schedule with a series of "Carte Blanche Concerts," allowing artists to choose their own pro-



CHRISTIAN STEINER

The Miró Quartet, from left: John Largessa, Joshua Gindele, Daniel Ching, and Sandy Yamamoto. The group will perform at Menlo@Music on Aug. 4-5.



grams. This year's series includes Kalish and baritone Randall Scarlata performing Schubert's "Winterreise" (July 25); Kahane giving a recital of Schumann and Chopin (July 29); Wu Han and Finckel performing Beethoven's sonatas for piano and cello (Aug. 3) and Bax playing a double-program of Bach transcriptions, plus finger-busting works by Berio, Liszt, Albeniz, Granados, Ravel and more (Aug. 8).

Wu Han — Menlo fans know she doesn't lack for enthusiasm — says Bax, who comes from Italy, is an "unbelievable pianist. The facility, the depth! It's unreal, the display of virtuos-

ity!"

Finally, once the festival ends on Aug. 14, it won't *really* be the end, because the first Music@Menlo Winter Series has just been announced.

"We've been hearing from our audience that they miss us in the wintertime," Wu Han says. And so there will be three concerts at the Menlo-Atherton performing arts center: The Emerson String Quartet (Oct. 3); a triple piano bill with Bax, Wu Han and Anne-Marie McDermott (Jan. 16, 2011); and "Great Piano Quartets" by Mozart, Beethoven and Schumann, performed by Kahane, Sussman, violist Paul Neubauer and cellist

#### **Music@Menlo chamber music festival**

**When:** July 23-Aug. 14

**Where:** At venues in Atherton and Palo Alto

**Tickets:** \$38-\$72, adults; \$10-\$35, students and youths; 650-331-0202, [www.musicatmenlo.org](http://www.musicatmenlo.org)

**Full schedule:** (Including free events): [www.musicatmenlo.org](http://www.musicatmenlo.org)

Christopher Costanza (May 8, 2011). Winter Series tickets will go on sale in June.

Contact Richard Scheinin at 408-920-5069.