



Left to right: Tatiana Kolchanova, Michael Liu, Jonathan Cheskin

“Compelling”, “Touching”, “Thought provoking”... Here are just a few reactions that we had heard after performing Bright Voices of the Darkest Hour: Music and the Holocaust concert on March 4th, 2017 in Community Music Center of Portland.



Left to Right: Anya Kalina, Michal Liu, Lynda Hess, Christopher Cox

It was incredible to be able to finally present the results of a full year of research, relationship building and rehearsals. Over 70 people in the audience were touched by stories illustrating the strong and inspiring influence that music has on people to survive in the most devastating of times.



Volunteers Miranda Bradley and Nora Barnett with PCM Board Secretary, Kristin Springer

It is still little known that music of all genres was a big part of life in the concentration camps, including the death camps. We took it as our goal to give a voice to rarely told stories of the Holocaust; stories of talented composers whose lives, careers and future were cut short or forever changed by the Nazi regime.



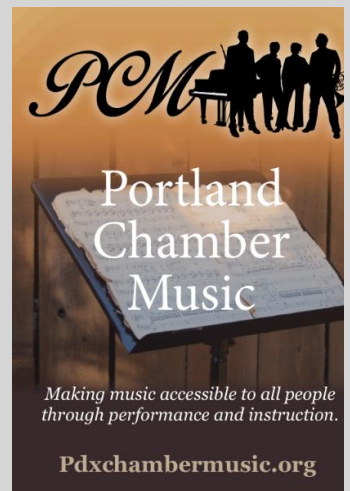
Left to right: Meghan Van Cleave, Michael Liu and Christopher Cox

Our program included pieces by Leo Smit, Dutch composer, killed at Sobibor death camp; Hans Gál, Austrian composer forced to flee to Great Britain where he taught and composed for the rest of his life; Paul Ben-Haim, a German composer who immigrated to Middle East running from the oppression and later become one of the major composers and music educators of Israel.

Coming Soon

April 8, 7 p.m.
Woodstock Neighborhood
Concert
Holy Trinity Lutheran
Church
7220 SE Cesar E Chavez
Blvd., Portland 97202

May 6, 4 p.m.
Astoria Outreach Concert
Grace Episcopal Church
1545 Franklin Ave., Astoria,
Oregon 97103



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Portland Chamber Music Newsletter



March 2017



Figure Left to right Michael Liu and Christopher Cox

Our audience especially enjoyed a Lullaby by Gideon Klein, written in 1943 at the Terezin Ghetto. We also performed a song cycle by Simon Sargon based on poems by the Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi as well as the 1st movement of a Brahms Piano Trio #1 in memory of its performance in 1943 in London, UK for Jewish refugees from Austria.



Performing the Sextet by Leo Smit. Left to right: Lynda Hess, Ann Van Bever, Michael Liu, David Taylor, Gemma Taylor, Christopher Cox

We are so grateful for the support of the community and especially for the grant funding from The Rabbi Joshua Stampfer Grant Fund, The Institute for Judaic Studies of the Pacific North West. Special thanks to the Executive Director of the Institute for Judaic Studies, Sylvia Frankel. Sylvia's knowledge and expertise of the history of the Holocaust gave us so much leverage and inspiration for our research and programming.



Audience members by our display boards

We were lucky to play with some wonderful musicians. Besides the talented PCM performers: Michael Liu – piano, Lynda Hess – flute, Christopher Cox – clarinet, Meghan Van Cleave – violin, Gemma Taylor – French Horn and Jonathan Cheskin – cello, we were joined by an amazing local oboist, Ann van Bever, an exceptional violinist, Tatiana Kolchanova and a former principal bassoon player with Seattle Symphony, David Taylor. And, as always, one of the most compelling parts of the program were introductions by our storyteller, Deborah Gitlitz.



Deborah Gitlitz, storyteller

Our gratitude also goes to our amazing volunteers and patrons. This program would have never happened without you!

Portland Chamber Music

Performers:

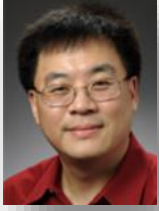
Lynda Hess, flute
Jennifer Crockett, clarinet
Chris Cox, clarinet
Meghan Van Cleave, violin
Gemma Taylor, French horn
Jonathan Cheskin, cello
Jonah Thomas, cello
Michael C. Liu, piano
Anya Kalina, soprano
Deborah Gitlitz, Storyteller
David Rutiezer, Storyteller

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Interview with Michael Liu, piano by Nora Barnett



Tell me about yourself. Is it true that you are a doctor as well as a musician?

You could say it's unique but not that unique these days. I started playing music at a young age and was fortunate enough to have moderate success with music. Growing up in the Chicago area, I was playing a lot. I was doing some professional performance after winning competitions while still very young.

When I was thinking about going to college, it was sort of like ... go to music school or do something else or go into the medical profession. I went with my father's advice, which was: if you get a scholarship to music, you can do whatever you want with that. If you don't, you should do something you can more easily make a living at.

I did get a scholarship for music at the University of Illinois and did a double major in Chemistry and Music. After that, each step of the way I thought: "OK, great, I have all this great experience in music, and I could give it up now and devote myself to study." However, I learned along the way, in pre-med, in medical school, and in residency, that there are a lot of physicians that play music, perform music, and use it as their outlet.

I was able to keep playing music through medical school (the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota), playing in the

orchestra as an orchestral pianist. I was also able to solo with the orchestra and play a lot of chamber music.

After I graduated, I thought I'd give that up and just go to work. With my wife's influence, I decided to do something different. After we got married, she said, "no more cold weather!" So, we went to work on the island of Guam. We got there and I thought "OK it's just going to be work. There shouldn't be much chance for music." But lo and behold, they had a symphony orchestra there made up of those in the military, those on the island, and those from the university's music school. Musicians from Japan came and played in the orchestra. For years, I was a board member in the orchestra, soloed in the orchestra, and played chamber music. It was a great experience and great fun too.

In 2001, we came back to the states. We got recruited to come to Vancouver, Washington. I came to be on the residency faculty, and the same thing happened. We got here and found out there was a symphony orchestra. I got involved, auditioned, became a board member, soloed with the orchestra, played chamber music, and actually formed their chamber music arm.

How do you find time to balance everything?

That's always the question that's asked! Ironically, the teaching part in medicine takes up more hours of responsibility because we have a 40 hour work week but we take calls at night and we take turns working in the hospital for 7 days a week. If we actually counted up the hours they say we are responsible for, it comes out to about 100 hours per week. But that

100 hours is not constant. It is not one patient after the other without a break. In between, I have a lot of waiting time. It's perfect for practicing music!

I read that you do non-classical music too. Could you tell us about the different genres of music you play?

Classical music is the standard of how one learns. Piano training is unique and can be started at a pretty young age. A lot of people learn piano but then don't continue beyond a certain level. There are different genres of music, the biggest draws being jazz and rock. Unlike jazz, classical music is very structured. Some of the best jazz musicians are partially self-taught. It is almost like they would be stifled in the classical music discipline.

I never really dabbled too much in jazz music until I came to Vancouver. I can play anything the way it's written, but I have a boss, who founded the residency program and used to be a jazz trumpet player and a mariachi player at a professional level. His whole learning of music was without the score, improvising as a jazz musician. He wanted us to play more music together so we formed a little jazz band. This forced me to self-learn to play more jazz music and pop music.

Who are your favorite composers or musicians?

I think my favorite composers would be Rachmaninoff and Brahms. I keep coming back to those. I love what Rachmaninoff was trying to create.

But I would say that since I was young, it was chamber music that attracted me most.

There is this one absolutely outstanding pianist, Menahem Pressler, who had taught in Indiana. He lived through so many of the great changes in music in the United States during the 40s, 50s, 60s, playing with the same ensemble, called the Beaux Arts Trio. He outlived 3 sets of other players. He is now 94, still performing, and still considered one of the best!

Is there anything else you want to share?

I'm just glad that I can keep playing and I keep getting asked and I can keep finding other musicians to do things with. I feel very lucky in that.





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Thank you!

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Contact Us

3519 NE 15th Ave #239

Portland, OR 97212

(503) 840-9185

[portlandchambermusic@
gmail.com](mailto:portlandchambermusic@gmail.com)

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