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A 60-year retrospective

By Keith Loria / Special to the Fairfax County Times
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Considered one of America's greatest classical composers, John Corigliano's oeuvre has won him five Grammy Awards, a Pulitzer Prize, the Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition and an Oscar.

To celebrate his 80th birthday, noted violinist Lara St. John has organized a musical retrospective of the composer's most beloved chamber music, playing *Wolf Trap* on April 22.

"This is sort of the greatest hits of John Corigliano, and we have a great group of musicians taking part in what spans almost 60 years," St. John said. "John wrote his violin sonata when he was just 21."

The Canadian-born St. John made her first solo appearance at the young age of 4, and her European debut with the Gulbenkian Orchestra when she was just 10. She entered the Curtis Institute at 13, and is considered one of the world's top violinists.

She has performed as a soloist with some of the top orchestras in the world, including the Boston Pops, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Zurich Chamber Orchestra, Camerata Ireland, the China Philharmonic, the Hong Kong Symphony, and the orchestras of Brisbane, Adelaide, and Auckland.

The violinist will be joined in the show by pianist Martin Kennedy, cellist Sterling Elliott, soprano Melinda Whittington, and the PUBLIQuartet, performing touchstones from Corigliano's collection of work.

The program will include "Sonata for Violin and Piano" (1963); "Phantasmagoria" for cello and piano; "Irish Songs" for soprano and flute; and "Dylan Songs" for soprano and piano.



Violinist Lara St. John leads an all-star cast of classical musicians to honor composer John Corigliano.

PHOTO BY J. FARLEY
PHOTOGRAPHY

St. John and Kennedy will end the program with the sonata, and noted it has a very special meaning to the composer.

“He wrote it for his father, who was concert master for the New York Philharmonic for almost 30 years,” St. John said. “Interesting enough, John actually gave me his dad’s bow, so whenever I play this, I am doing so with his father’s bow, so it’s kind of a huge circle.”

A few years ago, Corigliano decided to write a piece for the Tchaikovsky violin competition in Moscow, and decided he wanted it to sound “super American” and reached out to St. John.

“He knew I had a background in somewhat bluegrass and Celtic tradition so he had me over to show some techniques of cross-tuning and some of the rhythms and he ended up dedicating the piece [“Stomp”] to me,” she said. “That’s what I will open this program with.”

“Phastasmagoria” is based on Corigliano’s opera, “The Ghosts of Versailles,” and will feature the 18-year-old Elliott on cello; while “Dylan Songs” was written based on the songs of legendary singer Bob Dylan and Whittington will lend her beautiful voice.

St. John serves as Wolf Trap’s artistic advisor for chamber music at the Barns, and she made her debut on its stage in 2009 performing works by Bartok, Schoenberg and playing a premiere by Matthew Hindson, which inspired by nuclear testing in the Australian province of Maralinga. She feels the Barns is an amazing place to perform.

“It’s a very welcoming place,” she said. “It’s a really nice combination of a club and a concert hall. It’s also so beautiful.”

During intermission of the show, the musicians will be on stage taking audience questions and after the performance, a reception will be held. Plus, Corigliano will be in attendance at the show and St. John promises that she’ll be making him “talk a lot” during the celebration.

“He never gets tired talking about this music,” she said. “For people interested in American music and living composers, this is the chance of a lifetime. It’s an amazing chance for people to come out, meet him and shake his hand.”

“John Corigliano 8.0”

Wolf Trap

3 p.m., Sunday, April 22

Tickets: \$45

For more information, visit <http://www.wolftrap.org/>