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# ?Great Artists? help Aurora Cultural Centre mark tenth anniversary

The Aurora Cultural Centre will mark its tenth anniversary next month with a new set of ?Great Artists? set to grace its Brevik Hall stage.

On February 21, internationally acclaimed pianist Janina Fialkowska will kick off the 2020 Great Artists Music Series, one of the Aurora Cultural Centre's longest-running signature programs.

The Great Artists Series is the brainchild of Grammy winners Bonnie and Norbert Kraft, both acclaimed classical music artists, record producers and Aurora residents.

Ms. Kraft, who was the Aurora Cultural Centre's founding Board Chair, says she and her husband created the series as a way to bring world renowned artists ? and their sounds ? close to home.

?Ten years ago, we had a vision to bring great classical music concerts to our community and, at the time, we thought it would be a way to have concerts right at our doorstep and avoid the trek downtown, especially in the winter, while also giving deserving musicians the opportunity to play before an appreciative audience. Today, we are so gratified that the community has embraced the series and classical music offerings have become part of the regular offerings at the Aurora Cultural Centre.?

Since the series' inception, ?world class artists? have come to love playing at the Aurora Cultural Centre, says Ms. Kraft, and have been struck by the Centre's professionalism as a concert presenter. In turn, Ms. Kraft says she has been struck by the way the community has continued to support the Great Artists series.

Over the last two years, the couple have spearheaded the ?Fortissimo? campaign, allowing local music lovers and patrons to support the series by matching the Krafts' annual contributions. By the end of the 2019 season, the public had surpassed that challenge.

?That is really, really exciting because it really shows that they support, love and enjoy the series, which is fantastic,? she says. ?It also allows us to expand our offerings to the public. The feedback that we're getting, because of the success of the Fortissimo campaign, we've begun to offer pre-concert talks before every concert and they have proven to be enormously popular.

?We thought in that first week we would get a few people to come to the talks and everybody else would come to the concert afterwards, but it hasn't been so; almost all the people who come to the concerts come to the talks too, and that is a really great thing.?

The pre-concert talk has its roots in Norbert's career as a classic guitarist and music professor at the University of Toronto. There, he spoke before concerts to impart information not only on the following music program but background on the musical instruments coming into play as well.

Having been in the classical music realm for nearly 50 years, the Krafts draw on their contacts at home and abroad to program the series each year. They like to have a mix of mature artists ? those who bring a ?maturity, knowledge, wisdom and beauty? into their program ? as well as emerging artists to showcase emerging talent ?because they bring the energy and a hope of the future.?

?We like to stretch the classical envelope a little bit to have popular music and maybe even music and musicians that depict different sorts of cultural traditions peppered throughout the performances,? says Ms. Kraft. ?Throughout it all, it is really important for us to maintain a really high standard in the musicians that we engage. There's really no shortage of amazingly talented and wonderful musicians to choose from. We try to have Canadian artists as much as we can, but occasionally we bring in someone from abroad.?

Ms. Fialkowska is not just a Canadian artist, but a Canadian artist who lives and performs abroad. She is known for her ?glorious lyrical sound, her sterling musicianship and her profound sense of musical integrity.?

She launched her career in the early 1970s and was mentored by Arthur Rubinstein. A recipient of the Order of Canada and the Governor General's Lifetime Achievement Award in Classical Music, she is currently working on a new album of French piano music.

The next concert in the series will feature the Payadora Tango Ensemble on April 3, which will feature dance performances from Artistica Ballroom Dance Studio, and, on May 1, the cello and piano duo of Cameron Crozman and Philip Chiu.

?We want to make sure our audiences are entertained,? says Ms. Kraft. ?It can be just pure fun and pure enjoyment. Classical music doesn't have to be serious or intimidating. Norbert and I are still very much committed to continuing the series because our loyal community audience continues to enjoy the music ? as long as that happens, as long as we're able, we'll continue doing it. From the other side, a series such as ours ? it gives the opportunity for musicians to play and they need that opportunity. It keeps the music alive and live music is really important. It is easy to download, but there is nothing like the live performance.

?I really believe in the power of music to bring people together, crossing cultural barriers in its expression of our shared humanity. Besides that, it gives people an enjoyable night out and enjoying world class music right here in our own back yard.?

For more information on the Great Artists Music Series, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca.

**By Brock Weir**