



BRYAN AND SILVIA CHENG PERFORM BEETHOVEN DURING THEIR CHAMBERFEST CONCERT SATURDAY EVENING. SCREENCAPTURE PHOTO: PETER ROBB

COVID-19 has forced many changes on the performing arts — some devastating some imaginative. Necessity being the mother of invention as Aesop said. Musicians have been hosting concerts on front porches. Some have been standing up in front of a row of cars in drive-in theatres and others have been out standing in a field.

For Ottawa Chamberfest, the fall signals the onset of a popular concert series that often sees the 850 (or so) seats inside the Carleton Dominion-Chalmers Centre filled with eager music lovers looking for the live experience.

Not this year. Physical distancing rules mean that no more than 50 brave (and lonely) souls can be inside the confines of Dom-Chalm for a concert. What to do?

The answer is to invite a small crowd into the hall and to livestream a concert into the ether. To that end the fest will feature six shows this fall featuring artists with strong connections to Ottawa.

First up Saturday night were Ottawa's Bryan and Silvie Cheng with an evening of three cello piano sonatas (1, 4 and 5) and a marvellous new work by the American composer **Paul Wiancko** called Shifting Baselines which is an 'interpretation' of Sonata no. 4.

It's all part of a project the Chengs call Ludwig and Beyond in honour of Beethoven's 250th birthday. The siblings have commissioned three composers to respond musically to a cello-piano sonata by Beethoven. The other two commissioned works by **Dinuk Wijeratne** and **Samy Moussa**, will be played on Dec. 19 in the last concert of the fall series.

In the program notes for the concert Wiancko, who was watching the livestream Saturday evening along with 200 others, writes:

"Shifting Baselines is at once a reflection on my continuing journey with Beethoven's Sonata No. 4, a love letter to the cello, and an attempt to distill my own musical language down to its core elements—the title refers to a phenomenon defined as a gradual change in the accepted norms for the condition of the natural environment due to the loss of perception that occurs when each generation redefines what is 'natural'."

I watched the livestream from my home in West Quebec and while I do prefer a live concert for the energy of a full house, I suspect I enjoyed the livestream concert from a distance as much as the few people inside the concert hall did in their proximity, save some initial technical difficulties.

The Beethoven pieces were well played and as enjoyable as one might expect them to be. Bryan Cheng, who plays on the 1696 'Bonjour' Stradivari on loan from the Canada Council Musical Instrument Bank, is a world class talent. Silvie Cheng is a talented, sensitive, yet confident pianist.

But the Wiancko piece was the real treat of the 90 minute concert. The commission emerged after the Chengs met Wiancko a few years ago. They had heard his quartet called Lift and were inspired to reach out.

The result is a dramatic exploration of the key of C major, from the 'walking bass' opening to the exploration of scales that gave the piece its sophisticated drive.

The technology was plagued by gremlins that caused frozen screens intermittently during the first piece the Sonata for Piano and Cello No. 1 in F Major, Op. 5, No. 1, but that was remedied by a quick reboot before the beginning Cello Sonata No. 4 in C Major, Op. 102, No. 1. After that it was smooth sailing.

If you missed in Saturday evening, Chamberfest has extended access to the performance until Monday at 9 a.m. You can find out more at chamberfest.com.

All in all, given the complexity of our times this was a successful launch to an interesting [series](#). Next up the bass-baritone Russell Braun and his partner in life and on the piano Carolyn Maule on Oct. 6