

Waterloo Chamber Players Opens the Season with Fantastic Sounds

Anita Brooks Kirkland

The Waterloo Chamber Players is pleased to present the first concert of the 2022-23 season, *Fantastic Sounds*, on November 5 at 7:30 pm, at Knox Presbyterian Church. Joining us for this concert will be guest conductor, Ian Whitman.

Ian is the first of three guest conductors joining us this season as part of our conductor search process. This process, originally planned for 2021-22, was delayed with the cancellation of the season due to COVID. Our principal conductor Ben Bolt-Martin delayed his departure from the orchestra, helping us to create several videos during pandemic times. When we were comfortable enough to gather again in live performance in early May 2022, Ben finally conducted his farewell concert, delayed for two years. The highlight was Ben's own extraordinary cello concerto, *Among Friends*. This piece deserves to be in the repertoire, and Ben's performance as soloist was stunning. We are fortunate to be able to share [a video of the performance](#), conducted by another friend of the WCP, Daniel Warren.

During our 2022-23 season, Waterloo Chamber Players is delighted to work with three wonderful guest conductors, Ian Whitman, Andrew Chung, and Kira Omelchenko. Each of our candidates for principal conductor has planned an appealing program with an exciting range of repertoire for one of our three regular season concerts. WCP Co-Presidents Rick Bond and Tina Giannopoulos capture the optimism of the whole orchestra as we embark on this search.

While Waterloo Chamber Players is sad to have lost Ben Bolt-Martin as our principal conductor, this is also a time to look forward to new things with a new conductor. Each conductor brings to the music their own life experiences, knowledge, training and personality. We in the orchestra benefit from the new insights that a new conductor will bring to the music and from the vision for WCP that our new conductor will bring. It is exciting to think of where WCP might go under the leadership of each of the candidates for our Principal Conductor position.

As a member of the orchestra, I am pleased to be able to share a recent conversation with our first candidate, Ian Whitman. Ian reflects on his own journey to conducting, the repertoire he has selected for the concert, his passion for community music-making, and his vision for the future of the Waterloo Chamber Players.

Moving from the Back to the Front of the Orchestra

Ian is no stranger to Waterloo Region audiences, having been the principal bass player in the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony since 2012. He describes bass players as "orchestral creatures", playing an instrument with less solo and chamber music repertoire than other members of the orchestral string family. And from the back of the orchestra, he has become very interested in what transpires on the podium. He is fascinated by how the conductor deals with the varying characteristics of all of the instruments, and brings everything together. Conducting feels like a natural transition for Ian, an extension of his interest in music as a whole. He enjoys seeing and hearing the orchestra from the podium. "A different view of things can be interesting in a startling and good way."

Ian's interest in conducting is not new. He took his first conducting course when he was a Master's student at Yale. "I wasn't very good at first, which was a bit disheartening", Ian reflects, but after immersing himself in score study and seeking feedback from the instructor, he ended up being voted most improved by colleagues in his class.

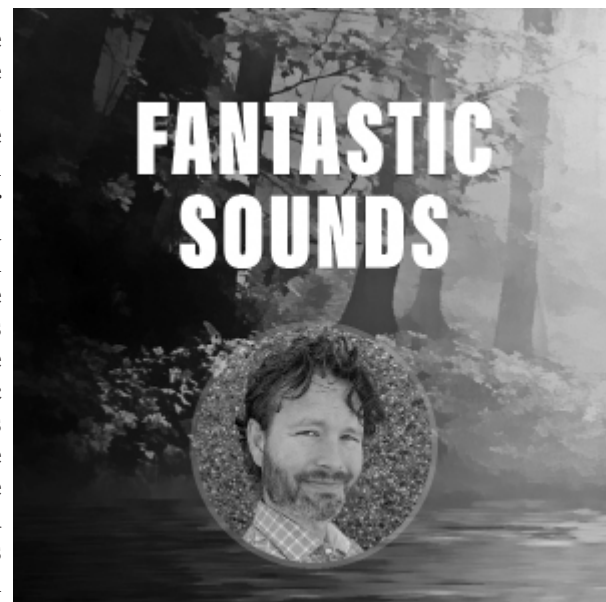
In recent years Ian has had the opportunity to renew his interest in conducting, working with the KWS Youth Orchestra in particular. Over the years he has continuously sought to understand the role of the conductor, citing a particularly insightful conversation with the late great, Boris Brott, talking about Brott's experience as assistant conductor to Leonard Bernstein. And of course Ian has a wonderful opportunity to observe and learn from the variety of conductors who perform with the KW Symphony.



Fantastic Sounds

Ian is proud of the theme for this concert with the Waterloo Chamber Players. All of the pieces tell the story of a fantasy world. Ian wanted to select familiar music that the orchestra could have fun with, but still be challenged. Of course there are the practicalities of programming, like making sure the music makes sense for the players available, and making sure also that the repertoire had not been performed recently by other groups in the area. The program includes Mendelssohn's

Midsummer Night's Dream Overture, *Peer Gynt Suite No. 1* by Edvard Grieg, and Brahms' *Variations on a Theme by Haydn*. Ian is very pleased to include *Postcards from the Sky*, for strings only, by Canadian composer Marjan Mozetich. Reflecting on the program, Ian says he is confident that he knows the music well and what he wants to say with it.



A Passion for Music in the Community

Ian is proud to reside in Waterloo Region and takes great interest in the history and culture of the area. He is passionate about sharing music with as many people as possible in the community, and has many ideas about what that means for the Waterloo Chamber Players.

What's unique about the WCP, he says, is that while the players are not professional, the level of playing is very high. "Everybody wants to be there and everyone wants to bring their A game and play at the highest level possible. Everyone wants to be treated with respect, and giving everyone a safe place to have fun but also to be professional is so important. So the happiness of the players is number one."

Ian also reflected on the richness of the music community in the KW region, and sees the importance of featuring local composers and performers. "The KWS is such a draw for the community, but so too are groups like WCP. Having these groups already here and established is a huge benefit to the community."

Future Possibilities for the Waterloo Chamber Players

Our discussion about community music making inevitably intersected with Ian's ideas for the WCP's potential and future plans. Ian is interested in community outreach in particular, and finding audiences in unexpected places. He gives the example of Boris Brott taking the Hamilton orchestra to perform in the foundry, and how that brought music to people who were not familiar with it, in a non-threatening way. "Concert halls can be intimidating." Ian likes the idea of presenting music in a comfortable environment, and helping those unfamiliar with the concert hall feel comfortable by explaining what is happening and why it happens.

It is key, however, to keep a strong connection with people who have been with the WCP over the years as audience members and supporters. Seeking out new audiences cannot come at the detriment of those who have supported the orchestra for a long time. "Be nice to those people, so that they always feel welcome, no matter the new endeavours that we may have".

Ian particularly likes WCP's "pay what you can" system, observing that the cost of admission can limit access for some. The system encourages people of all areas and income brackets to come out to concerts, and removes barriers to sharing a love of music with as many people as possible. "There is so much talk about affordability and housing here, but this is something that we as musicians can offer to the community."

As we've been rehearsing with Ian over the past few weeks, the orchestra has heard many more of his ideas for the future. We invite you to come and enjoy our performance with him at the front of the orchestra, on the Waterloo Chamber Players podium.