

A Sherwood Legend with the Waterloo Chamber Players

Anita Brooks Kirkland

The Waterloo Chamber Players is pleased to present the second concert of the 2022-23 season, *Sherwood Legend*, on February 25 at 7:30 pm, at Knox Presbyterian Church. Joining us for this concert will be guest conductor, Andrew Chung.

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 continue with this search. “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 share a recent conversation with our second candidate, Andrew Chung. Andrew is familiar to Kitchener-Waterloo audiences as the conductor of the Wellington Wind Symphony, and indeed I have had the pleasure of playing under his direction as a member of that group.

Andrew has had a distinguished career as both a trumpet player and a conductor. As an orchestral musician, he served as the principal trumpet with the Hong Kong Chamber Orchestra, the Hong Kong Youth Symphony, the Asian Youth and the Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra. Andrew attended the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, the University of Hong Kong, the University of Toronto, and the University of Freiburg, Germany. A scholarship from the Centre d’Arts, Orford allowed him to study conducting with Raffi Armenian and Agnes Grossman, and that launched his conducting career, leading many orchestras and wind ensembles in both Canada and Hong Kong.

In our far-ranging conversation, Andrew reflected on the musical potential of the chamber orchestra, the repertoire he has selected for the concert, and what attracts him particularly to working with the Waterloo Chamber Players.

The Art of Playing is the Art of Listening

I started our conversation by asking Andrew about the differences between conducting a wind ensemble and an orchestra. For Andrew, the difference stems from the obvious, the presence of the string section. “String players communicate amongst themselves, particularly with bowing”, he observed. “With a chamber orchestra like the WCP the conductor becomes the facilitator, and must stay out of the way. The bulk of the responsibility lies with the strings.”

Andrew emulates great conductors whose success he credits to their ability to treat the orchestra like a chamber group. He always encourages orchestral players to perform chamber music with colleagues in the group. “Chamber music is the highest form of music-making. It is easier to conduct the orchestra when that sense of chamber music is instilled. The art of playing is the art of listening. As the conductor, I need to get the group to listen carefully and rely less on the stroke.”

When preparing a score, Andrew’s aim is to understand how the music was intended, saying that ultimately it’s about how the audience receives the music. The conductor is the story-teller.

“I do what I think the composer wants, and as the conductor I prepare the group for that to happen. Music starts where words fail to express. The conductor creates the conditions for the group to internalize the message.”

Heroes and Legends

The three pieces that Andrew has programmed for the concert are connected through the sense of story and the mystery of legends, starting with *L’Arlésienne Suite No. 1* by Georges Bizet. The suite of incidental music for a play by Alphonse Daudet portrays a girl from Arles, or *l’Arlésienne*, set against the play’s dark story of a young man driven to madness by her infidelity.

Also on the program is Franz Schubert’s *Symphony #8, the “Unfinished”*. The story to be told here emanates from the music itself, and the reason that Schubert did not finish the work may be integral to that story, Andrew speculates. “It is in the key of B minor, which is very rare. It is a very dark mode, and the first theme feels like we are falling into an abyss. The string parts sound like swishing through tall grass. The oboe and clarinet theme emerges almost like the legendary monster Pan trying to catch the fairies. So dark!”

The second movement is in the sub-dominant key of E major, “the key of love”. “It’s like a flower blossoming.” There are many theories as to why Schubert did not complete the symphony with a third movement. Perhaps the symphony remained unfinished because Schubert didn’t know how to get back to B minor, Andrew suggests. Symphonies typically end in a major key, but perhaps Schubert was ready to break that pattern. “He was an early adventurer into atonality. The music is so non-verbal, and open to interpretation.”

The concert’s theme was inspired by composer Elizabeth Raum’s *Sherwood Legend*, which features Tony Snyder as the French Horn soloist. “The story is very well-suited to the horn’s heroic character, in the tradition of the music of Richard Strauss.” Programming the work gave Andrew not only the opportunity to highlight a Canadian composer, but also to feature a local musician as soloist. Tony Snyder is the principal horn with the Guelph Symphony Orchestra, and

has performed with many other local groups. In 2018 Tony had the wonderful opportunity of playing first horn with the Berlin Philharmonic under the legendary conductor Simon Rattle in their annual “Be the Phil” concert, which invites amateur players from around the world to join the orchestra for the season opener.

As for interpreting the story, Andrew says it is wonderful to work with a living composer. “If I have a question, I can actually ask why!”

The WCP Culture of Adventure

As our conversation progressed, I asked Andrew what interested him particularly about being a part of the Waterloo Chamber Players. He immediately responded that it was the orchestra’s willingness to be adventurous with programming. “For me, a musical group must change with the times. The WCP has a history of adventurous programming. One of the key questions that the orchestra’s co-president Rick Bond asked me when I applied for the position was, “How do you make the program more interesting?”

The orchestra is open to these new experiences. “When the orchestra is excited about the programming, that gets the audience excited. You can’t sell the musical product unless the orchestra believes this is the way to go.” Andrew believes his role is to understand how the music was intended, and to prepare the orchestra to convey that meaning. “People are often nervous about unfamiliar music, and if the group is not properly prepared, the audience is left cold. Being well-prepared is absolutely necessary in order to engage the audience.”

Andrew also emphasized the importance of understanding the local audience, and with every group he conducts he invites members to serve on a programming committee. “Nobody knows what the community wants better than the people in the group. I may have my ideas about innovation: the committee can help with their knowledge of what the local audience will find relatable, and when the audience will be ready to receive these ideas.”

Truth Before Beauty

When you as a musician understand the intent of the composer, and when you can internalize the music’s truth, only then is it possible for the music’s beauty to be received by the audience. This concept is at the centre of what Andrew Chung believes about music-making. “If you do the music well, the people *experience* it, and that is so much more important than *understanding* it. It is possible to understand, but not to ‘get it’. Truly getting it, from the audience’s point of view, is about the experience.

Andrew also sees music programming in terms of how other arts can be incorporated. Composers are often inspired by a painting, or a beautiful building, but it never goes the other way. “Music is the after-product of the culture. People don’t do paintings about a piece of music.” To Andrew, exploring how music is interconnected with painting, literature and philosophy offers exciting opportunities. “Music enhances the graphic representation. If the group is adventurous enough to do this, I am freer in exploring uncharted territory.”

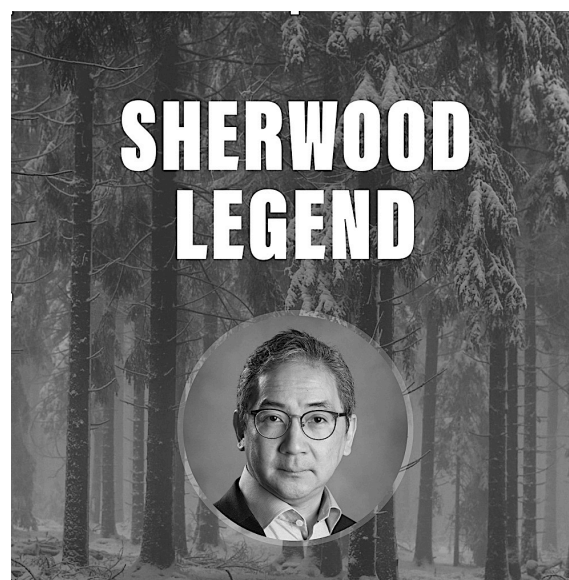
The Waterloo Chamber Players has a history of adventurous programming, which excites Andrew. We look forward to going with him on this journey in musical story-telling at our *Sherwood Legends* concert.

Sherwood Legend with the Waterloo Chamber Players

Andrew Chung, Guest Conductor

Tony Snyder, French Horn

Saturday February 25, 2023 – 7:30 pm, Knox Presbyterian Church, Waterloo



photos: top: Tony Snyder; below: Andrew Chung