

Eau Claire Chamber Orchestra wraps up season with works by Midwest composers

Included is piece by orchestra music director Ivar Lunde

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Eau Claire Chamber Orchestra will conclude its 2015-16 season by highlighting contemporary American composers.

The ensemble will perform at 7:30 p.m. Saturday at Grace Lutheran Church, 202 W. Grand Ave. The concert, titled "American Dreams," will feature works by Iowa and Wisconsin-based composers Jerry Owen, Ivar Lunde Jr. and the duo of Cheryl Leah and Ed Willett.

"Normally ECCO has tried to perform established pieces with new pieces, so this is kind of daringly different in that these are all pieces that really nobody has ever heard," said Lunde, who is ECCO's conductor and music director. "So it will be interesting to see what the reaction is."

Written in 2003, Owen's "Suite from Grant Wood Country" is a three movement work for strings and optional harp commissioned by Linn-Mar High School in Marion, Iowa. The work was inspired by Grant DeVolson Wood's paintings of the rural Midwest.

Lunde's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 126, was composed in the summer of 2014. ECCO's general manager Elizabeth Hart will perform as soloist on this number.

Willett and Leah combined their compositions with the writings of Scottish born naturalist John Muir in "John Muir – University of the Wilderness." Lunde called it a "fusion piece," with contemporary, classical and Celtic influences.

Along with ECCO, the piece will include Willett, Leah and Liesel Wilson, and Thomas Clyde Mitchell will narrate Muir's life from Scotland to Wisconsin to the great Sierra Nevada mountains.

Lunde said the concert's title, "American Dreams" comes from the fact they're all American composers and the "melting pot" of influences, noting Owen's background is Czech, his is Norwegian and then there's Scottish influences in the piece inspired by Muir's writings.

"The whole thing is that people from Europe come to the country and go for the American dream," Lunde said.

Normally the orchestra includes about 20 or 25 people, but this concert will feature about 40 musicians, Lunde said.

Images:



Staff photos by Elizabeth Jackson - Ivar Lunde Jr. conducts the Eau Claire Chamber Orchestra on Sunday during a rehearsal of his composition. The ensemble's final concert of the season, "American Dreams," will be Saturday at Grace Lutheran Church in Eau Claire. This will be Lunde's final ECCO concert as music director.



Ivar Lunde conducts The Eau Claire Chamber Orchestra during a practice of his composition "Concerto for Piano and Orchestra," which will be performed at ECCO's American Dreams concert at 7:30pm, April 16, 2016 at Grace Lutheran Church in Eau Claire.



Michael Eastwood plays the bass with the Eau Claire Chamber Orchestra during

Besides the music, artwork by Jean Accola of Durand will be on display and all of the composers will be featured at a pre-concert panel at 6:45 p.m. moderated by Wisconsin Public Radio's Stephanie Elkins.

"It's kind of exciting for an audience to see composers because usually you listen to music and you don't have access to the composer," Hart said. "This way they'll be right there and you'll get a little insight to people's personalities and thought processes."

This will also be the final ECCO concert for Lunde as conductor and music director.

Hart said more details about the upcoming 2016-17 season and the orchestra's new music director will be released in the coming months.

As they wrap up this season, both Hart and Lunde complimented the musicians, noting the hard work and effort they put in to learn this unfamiliar and complex music.

"It's just been really fun," Hart said.

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Sunday's rehearsal of Lunde's composition. This is the first time Eastwood has performed with ECCO. About 40 musicians will perform at the upcoming concert, Lunde said.