PORT TOWNSEND & JEFFERSON COUNTY LEADER

Blurring musical lines

by Jimmy Hall | October 24, 2018

Both behind the keys and pen, Wayne Horvitz has carved himself a space in the Pacific Northwest's music scene with his experimental approach in jazz and classical music. Courtesy photo

Pushing the boundaries of his musicianship has been the goal for Seattle-based composer and pianist Wayne Horvitz throughout his storied career.

From composing a work intended to be played within the concrete bunkers of Fort Worden with a dancer/choreographer, to writing a musical suite based on 11 Richard Hugo poems, Horvitz looks to combine various sounds, from electronic to chamber music, to create something even more striking than before.

Horvitz will once again make an appearance in Port Townsend to present two of his latest musical creations. The event will showcase the Wayne Horvitz Trio, who will perform the entirety of their recently released CD “The Snowghost Sessions,” and his String Quartet No. 4, who will play “These Hills of Glory,” with Beth Fleenor as a clarinet soloist.

Horvitz’s music blurs the boundaries between classical chamber music and small-group improvised jazz. The concert will showcase this artistic crossover by combining a classical string quartet with an improvisational soloist and jazz trio, supplemented with electronics, samples and Horvitz's signature compositions.

Horvitz said “The Snowghost Sessions” was born when he received free studio time in Whitefish, Montana. Without a project in mind, he retreated to the Snowghost Studios with Geoff Harper on contrabass and Eric Eagle on drums and percussion.

“We took a loose approach, and the concerts have the same feel,” Horvitz said, adding that what came out of that time was music that was abstract, experimental and lovely. Horvitz described the album as ballads mixed with piano and electronics, in a quiet and nuanced sort of way. “We've done a bunch of gigs recently, and audiences have not only liked the music but were intrigued by it,” Horvitz said.

The other piece being performed is “These Hills of Glory.” The piece was written for the Seattle Symphony, incorporating four movements in a 16-minute piece. Though Horvitz is credited as the composer, he didn't perform on the original recording and won't be part of this performance either. The symphony will not travel to Port Townsend for the concert. Instead, a string quartet will perform.

“These Hills of Glory” was written in 2005 and has had other iterations since then, including a version performed by an improvisational soloist. Horvitz highlighted the second movement, the fastest of the four, which was written at Port Townsend's North Beach.

“In a nutshell, the concert displays the full range of Mr. Horvitz's creative abilities: composer, pianist and electronic musician,” said concert organizer Bob Francis in a press release. “It affords us the opportunity to experience cutting-edge contemporary art music at its highest level.”

Horvitz, a Seattle resident, is no stranger to Port Townsend. He has been making occasional visits for performances and leisure since 1990. “It's our favorite place to go for a couple of days,” Horvitz said about the Olympic Peninsula's most northeastern point. He complimented Fort Worden's facilities, singling out its concrete bunkers that his children climbed through in the past.

One of his landmark artistic endeavors in Port Townsend came in 2011, when he, in collaboration with Centrum and choreographer/dancer Yukio Suzuki, created “55: Music and Dance in Concrete.” Fifty-five fragments from composed motifs for chamber music and 55 others from various invited improvisational musicians were combined and presented at Fort Worden's concrete bunkers and cistern. The live performance in the darkened spaces invited visitors to walk through the concrete structures for an experience in music, video and dance. The experimental project was part of Centrum's Reverberations series and followed Horvitz’s residency at Centrum.

The concert will take place at 7 p.m. Oct. 26 in the Quimper Unitarian Fellowship’s sanctuary, 2333 San Juan Ave. Tickets are sold in advance through Brown Paper Tickets or a $20 suggested donation at the door. No one will be turned away for lack of funds.