

FOCUS



BILL HENRY Sun Times files

Richard Mascall conducts string students at Owen Sound's Alexandra school in February, 2011, as part of an enrichment program funded by the SweetWater Music Festival. Much to the enrichment of the area, part of the festival's mission is musical education.

COLUMN

Each SweetWater Festival a once in a lifetime experience for the artists and audience alike

What makes an Owen Sound crowd leap to their feet and cheer? An Attack goal, of course.

For nine years dueling fiddles at the SweetWater Music Festival have had the same effect.

Enthusiastic audiences have come to hear performances ranging from Bach to jazz. Seeing and being part of the performances is as important for enjoying this music as it is for rock or folk.

SweetWater doesn't hire existing groups or solo acts to come and do their thing. What you see and hear is not available anywhere else. The artists come together to create unique collaborative music. One time only!

Mark Fewer, the artistic director, says "What you experience is a group of truly gifted individuals coming together to do something musically exceptional... once. It's a unique experience."

The 10th SweetWater anniversary year begins with a piano recital by Marc Pierre Toth, a Canadian pianist currently based in Germany. After performing with the Grey Bruce Symphony Youth Orchestra at the Roxy on Feb. 13, he will play three Beethoven piano sonatas in the Historic Leith Church on Feb. 15.

On Good Friday, March 29, Fewer will bring a string quartet to Georgian Shores Church for a performance of *The Seven Last Words of Christ*. It's Haydn's musical response to the focal



R. MICHAEL WARREN

Peter Little will provide narration for what promises to be a moving event.

Fewer, violin in hand, will illustrate his unique approach to music at a Bluewater Association for Lifelong Learning (BALL) lecture on April 18. It will feature The Brandenburg Concertos of Bach: the music of Abundance and Generosity.

Fewer spent his high school and university summers living with Jean and Keith Medley, co-founders of SweetWater, on their farm in Annan. He knows and loves this area.

He is a specialist in early music and a member of the Washington based Smithsonian Chamber Players. A onetime concert master of the Vancouver Symphony, he is now a professor of music at McGill University. Mark is a Grammy and Juno jazz award winner and has recorded with The Barenaked Ladies and Holy Cole.

The season peaks on the weekend of Sept. 20-22 when local musicians join with international stars from Canada, Europe and the United States. They will include James Campbell and two-thirds of the Gryphon trio. Last year the festival featured four Juno award winners

because of the rare opportunity to play an exciting repertoire together. Watching them perform is like being part of a jam session. For the musicians there is also the pleasure of living with and getting to know local families.

SweetWater began 10 years ago with Mark playing Bach solo violin on instruments made by local luthiers. This year their string instruments — created from raw wood to final product — will be exhibited at the Tom Thomson Art Gallery. The instruments sell around the world for thousands of dollars. You can hear them played in Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto* on Saturday.

And, as usual, there will be jazz. The VanDiango jazz group will celebrate the music of jazz violinists Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grapple. Their concert will be held on Saturday afternoon in conjunction with the luthier's instrument exhibit at the Tom.

This fall audiences will be treated to all of Bach's *Brandenburg* concerti: exciting and varied works that display the skills of various instrumental combinations. Ontario Saxophonist and film music composer Rob Carli will provide a contemporary take on the *Brandenburgs* with a seventh concerto to complement the original six.

Leith Church was chosen to inaugurate the festival because of its superb acoustics. Since then additional concerts have been

on Saturday and Sunday to accommodate growing audiences. Local musicians will provide orchestral support to James Campbell's grand finale performance on Sunday.

SweetWater's mission includes musical education. Again this year, visiting musicians will provide master classes for aspiring local musicians. SweetWater supported a trial string program at the Alexandra school in 2010-11. The initial trial was successful. It needs and deserves broader community support.

An audience survey last year revealed that people come to the festival from other parts of southern Ontario beyond Grey and Bruce. To make SweetWater even more of a regional attraction, organizers are creating a weekend package this year that includes accommodation, food, concert tickets and an historical tour of the area.

One of the main pleasures of the festival is watching musicians making great music while they have fun — challenging and supporting each other. One folk music fan describes SweetWater as "a visceral experience, fabulous, with tears and laughter in every concert."

And, you don't need to know Beethoven from Brubeck to enjoy it all.

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