

Classical Music

Cutting-edge classical artists at festival



Greg Stepanich

It is often said of the forceful that they take no prisoners, and if that's true, then Cameron Carpenter lays waste to the village as well.

Carpenter is one of the most interesting classical musicians working today, not least because he's carved out a remarkable and hugely busy career as a virtuoso on the organ, an instrument usually associated with church, and for whose associated culture the 32-year-old musician has little patience. A prodigious performer, arranger, composer and showman, Carpenter marries the flamboyance of Virgil Fox with the seriousness of Wynton Marsalis, and he is well on his way to giving the King of Instruments a whole new birth of the cool, starting with the instrument itself.

"I'm sort of the world's leading advocate for the digital organ, even though there's no competition for that title," said Carpenter, who will be playing a Rodgers digital organ when he performs next Thursday at the Festival of the Arts Boca with the Boca Raton Symphonia. "But it is really an instrument that I believe in so firmly, because for an artist to be at the knife's edge of an instrument that's still developing and maturing is an unbelievably rich artistic experience, and has everything to commend it as far as being able to bend the instrument to your will and to push it in lots and lots of new directions

in which it's never gone."

Carpenter is among the featured artists at the Boca festival, which opened Thursday and runs through March 16. Now in its seventh year, it's a combination literary-and-music festival, and in the past it has featured Renee Fleming, Itzhak Perlman, Joshua Bell, Yefim Bronfman, the Russian National Orchestra under Mikhail Pletnev, and the young poperatic sensation Jackie Evancho.

This year, the classical focus is on younger, cutting-edge artists, beginning with the Korean-born violinist Amadeus Leopold (born Hanbin Yoo in Seoul and previously known as Hahn-Bin), who appears on Madonna's latest album and who will play the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto on Saturday night with the Boca Raton Symphonia on a concert of music devoted to that composer, directed by Constantine Kitsopoulos.

Next Friday, March 15, the Ukrainian-born pianist Valentina Lisitsa makes a return appearance at the festival with Rachmaninov's Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini (Op. 43), performing with Miami Beach's New World Symphony under Peter Oundjian, director of the Toronto Symphony. That program also includes the Symphony No. 1 of Samuel Barber (Op. 9) and the Symphony No. 4 (in F minor) of Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Carpenter will be the soloist in the Toccata Festiva (Op. 36) of Barber as well as the Organ Symphony (No. 3 in C minor, Op. 78) of Camille Saint-Saëns, probably the best-known work of its kind. He'll also take part in William Walton's Spitfire and Fugue, and play some solo works as well.

"The orchestra, and Mr. Kitsopoulos, and the whole



Cameron Carpenter, an organist, will play at the Festival of the Arts in Boca with the Boca Raton Symphonia next Thursday. CONTRIBUTED

team have been really fantastic because basically they've given me control over the program," he said. "(The Barber toccata) is such a wonderful example of how music in what we consider the modern era can be so easily understandable. I consider it an ideal of what the music I would like to make is. It's a self-intelligible whole, as John Dewey would say. It is something you can understand on first hearing, if you listen carefully."

Home-schooled in rural Meadville, Pa., before being sent off to study at the Amer-

ican Boychoir School and the North Carolina School of the Arts, he studied music at the Juilliard School and earned his master's degree there in 2006. His 2008 Telarc debut album, "Revolutionary," was nominated for a Grammy, the first organ solo disc to be so honored. Next month he's doing three concerts with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and a solo recital at Disney Hall, and this summer he'll team with director Peter Sellers and bass Eric Owens in a staging of music by Shostakovich and J.S. Bach at the

Manchester International Festival in England.

Currently a resident of the German capital of Berlin ("I just love the place"), Carpenter says he hopes to write "the three great neo-Romantic organ concertos" before turning 40 (and says his Op. 3, The Scandal, premiered in 2011, was the first of them) and agrees with the suggestion that bringing down the barriers of traditional classical music culture is central to his art.

"That's coming to full fruition now, because it really is the situation for me that most of those barriers don't really exist, and arguably shouldn't exist," he said.

For more information about the festival and tickets, call 866-571-2787 or visit www.festivaloftheartsboca.org. All concerts take place outdoors at the Mizner Park Amphitheatre in Boca Raton.

Other concerts: The Artemis Quartet of Berlin plays the Four Arts on Sunday afternoon, scheduling music by Mendelssohn, Schubert and the Quartet No. 2 of Alberto Ginastera (3 p.m., \$15; call 655-7226 or visit www.fourarts.org).

On Monday, Italian pianist Mariangela Vacatello appears in the Kravis Center's Young Artists series in a program of music by Beethoven, Ravel, Chopin and the contemporary Italian composer Salvatore Sciarrino (7:30 p.m., Rinker Playhouse; tickets: \$30, call 832-7469 or visit www.kravis.org) ... the Euclid Quartet closes out the Duncan Theatre's Classical Café concerts on Wednesday afternoon with music by Schubert, Haydn and the delectable Puccini miniature Crisantemi (3 p.m., Palm Beach State College, Lake Worth; tickets: \$27, call 868-3309 or visit www.duncantheatre.org).