

VERMONT ARTS



PHOTO BY CALEB KENNA

Flutist Karen Kevra will celebrate her final concert as artistic director of Capital City Concerts, which she founded 26 years ago, with “Fauré Foray,” an all-Fauré program, at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, April 25, at the Unitarian Church of Montpelier.



COURTESY WIKIPEDIA

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

‘FAURÉ FORAY’ Flutist Karen Kevra makes CCC swan song

By JIM LOWE
STAFF WRITER

Twenty-six years ago, flutist Karen Kevra founded what was to become one of the foremost concert series in Vermont. With the inspiration and support of her mentor and teacher Louis Moysé, Capital City Concerts became a chamber music series unusually featuring, rather than established ensembles, unique

programs and personnel — often bringing Vermont’s finest musicians together with outstanding artists from around the world. And with it came Capital City Concerts’ unique audience.

THE LOWE DOWN

“It’s like a breath of fresh air, coming and playing in a beautiful place that that the audience wants to be there and they are listening intently,” says violinist Laurie Smukler, a renowned New York violinist and regular on the series.

■ CAPITAL CITY CONCERTS

Capital City Concerts presents “Fauré Foray,” an all-Fauré program to bid farewell to Karen Kevra, at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, April 25, at the Unitarian Church, 130 Main St. Montpelier. For tickets or information, go online to www.capitalcityconcerts.org

“And Karen has developed it — a great series, with a great audience and wonderful celebratory and also profound music. So that’s how I feel about it,” Smukler said. “And I feel very lucky that she has asked me to come a lot over the years.” Capital City Concerts will present “Fauré

Foray,” an all-Fauré program to bid farewell to Kevra, at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, April 25, at the Unitarian Church of Montpelier. A reception will follow.

The program includes the Piano Quartet

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COURTESY CAPITAL CITY CONCERTS

Flutist Karen Kevra with her mentor Louis Moysé in France.

CCC

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No. 1 in C minor, Op. 15, Violin Sonata No. 1 in A Major, Op. 13, and Fantaisie for flute and piano, featuring Kevra, Smukler, violist Tal First, cellist Natasha Brofsky and pianist Qing Jiang. The program opens with the Sicilienne from “Pelléas et Mélisande” with incoming Co-Artistic Directors Jillian Reed and Tyler Emerson joining Kevra.

Fauré, Louis and CCC

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) was a composer, organist, pianist and teacher, one of the foremost French composers of his generation, who influenced many 20th-century composers. His music has been described as linking the end of Romanticism with the modernism of the 20th century.

“I feel a unique connection to Fauré,” Kevra said. “My teacher and mentor, Louis Moysé, was part of the classical music scene in Paris in the 1920s, and as an adolescent he encountered Fauré. Louis once described that meeting to me — he said, ‘He had a huge mane of hair! He looked like a lion!’” Moysé (1912-2007), one of the great flutists of the 20th century, as well as a concert pianist and prolific composer, was one of the co-founders of Marlboro Music Festival. Kevra, after she had begun studying with him, convinced Moysé to move to Montpelier where he spent his last years and became an integral part of the central Vermont music community. (Kevra was Moysé’s flute protégée; Alison Bruce Cerutti was his piano protégée.) “In the lead-up to this concert, my thoughts continue to turn toward Louis,”

Kevra said. “I studied with him for over 10 years. But it was so much more than flute lessons — he showed me how to live life with music woven into almost every aspect — attending concerts with him, listening to recordings, and watching operas, even paying attention to birdsong as we sat on his back deck together after a long, lingering springtime lunch. “It was a kind of musical and emotional infusion, and it shaped my musical tastes, standards, and expression. CCC grew out of that,” Kevra said. “I worked hard to offer truly great music performed by exceptional musicians. Louis was part of a French musical dynasty, and his presence brought elegance and class to the organization. He really set the tone, and we all felt it when he and (his wife) Janet walked into the concerts — they always dressed to the nines: Louis in a suit, with



COURTESY CAPITAL CITY CONCERTS

Violinist Laurie Smukler is bringing her New York friends to join Karen Kevra in “Fauré Foray.”

cufflinks and a bow tie; Janet in her fancy pantsuits, coiffed hair, and makeup.”

Youth and excellence

Smukler, a beloved CCC favorite, returns with her New York City colleagues — violist Tal First, cellist Natasha Brofsky, and pianist Qing Jiang. The program features the dramatic C Minor Piano Quartet, the luminous A Major Violin Sonata, and the sparkling Fantaisie for flute and piano. “My younger colleagues are quite amazing,” Smukler said. “The violist that’s coming up, Tal First, actually was not my student, but I coached him in chamber

music at Juilliard. He was still a violinist then, and I thought he was amazing. Now he’s been in the (Metropolitan Opera Orchestra) for three years as Associate Principal Violist. And then I played with him last year in Karen’s series in May. And I’ve actually hired him for Kneisel Hall for part of this summer as a faculty member. “You know, I hate to say they’re all a little younger than me, but they are all younger than me,” Smukler said. “And (cellist) Natasha Brofsky is the closest to me in age, also the tallest. All three of them are on the faculty at Kneisel Hall now, my chamber music school and festival (in Blue Hill, Maine).

“I played a recital with pianist Qing Jiang in New York this year,” Smukler said. “We have some recording plans together.” Smukler shares Kevra’s feeling about Fauré and the program. “Most people who love music and love Fauré know those two pieces,” Smukler said of the sonata and quartet. “They’re wonderful. I mean, they’re full of passion and lightness and soaring lyricism. They’re filled with a lot of beauty that we all need to hear, and I need to play, and my colleagues need to play.” “Our audience was always the reason that musicians clamored to return to CCC,” Kevra said. “I really believe

that the CCC audience is the best you will find anywhere — enthusiastic, warm, engaged, appreciative. There is a community stake — even a sense of ownership and pride in these special concerts planned with the wonderful people of Montpelier in mind.”

Looking to the future

This concert won’t be Kevra’s final performance, only her last as Capital City Concerts artistic director. “No question — it will be bittersweet — but with that comes a sense of relief, too,” she said. “I can tell you that 26 years of waking up every morning with a CCC to-do list filling my head is a long time.

“I don’t see this as ‘retirement’ for me but rather redirecting. As I begin to accept performing invitations, I have real feelings of delight that I can show up to play and not sweat the gazillion other details.” Kevra’s successors as artistic directors of Capital City Concerts will be her student, flutist Jillian Reed, and her husband, pianist Tyler Emerson.

“As for advice for my successors and the organization,” Kevra said, “I’d say, ‘Put the music first. And always strive for the highest standards. Increasingly, I see many concert series turning toward social issues, even wrapping these topics into performances and programming. While they surely are worthwhile causes, I think what we most crave is the pure experience of listening together,

without an agenda, and putting politics aside. The music is enough.” Kevra created the season’s final program before deciding to step down. “Even so, it is a fine representation of what we typically do,” she said. “I understand that the ‘meat and potatoes’ of chamber music is repertoire for strings and piano, with winds taking a lesser role. That is decidedly the case for this concert. And what music! — by a composer that Louis knew personally!

“The concert will end with Fauré’s gorgeous and arresting C minor Piano Quartet — a piece that Louis loved and which we programmed on Capital City Concerts years ago, when the incredible members of the truly legendary Paris Piano Trio were joined by violist Bruno Pasquier. “When the audience hears the opening strains of that quartet on April 25, they will think, ‘THIS is Capital City Concerts!’” jim.lowe@timesargus.com / jim.lowe@rutlandherald.com