

Concert spotlights budding N.C. jazz talent

Composers Charlotte presenting 11 student composers under Claire Ritter's tutelage.

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Grace Kennedy practices for the upcoming performance at Queens University of Charlotte.

Charlotte offers jazz lovers but a handful of venues that regularly

host the uniquely American art form. So the upcoming Composers Charlotte concert at Queens University of Charlotte is particularly welcome.

The program will feature 11 student composers/improvisers, each under the tutelage of internationally regarded American New Music composer, performer and recording artist Claire Ritter. The theme for the performance is "inspired by water." In addition to student compositions, the program will highlight Ritter's own water-influenced compositions, which are featured on her upcoming CD, "Stream of Pearls."

Ritter, a Charlotte native and artistic director for Composers Charlotte - a program that showcases her compositions along with those of her colleagues and students - has a long-standing relationship with Queens, her alma mater. She founded the Composers Charlotte in 1998, shortly after sharing the stage at Queens with Loonis McGlohon when they performed a tribute concert to longtime Charlotte Symphony arranger and jazz teacher Ziggy Hurwitz.

A recipient of the N.C. Arts Council Jazz Composer's Fellowship, Ritter received funding through the Arts & Science Council's grassroots grant and later a regional artist grant to subsidize two Composer Charlotte performances.

The concert at Queens will be the seventh such performance. Like its predecessors, it spotlights local students, Ritter's own work and special out-of-town guests sharing newly composed jazz works.

"The music department is delighted to see a commitment by our alumni to developing local talent in the area," said Paul Nitsch, the Carolyn G. McMahon professor of music at Queens.

"We are all very proud of Claire and what she has been able to accomplish with this program," said Nitsch, also the artistic director of the Friends of Music program at Queens.

Ritter will perform with percussionist Takaaki Masuko of Boston. He teaches at the Longy School of Music in Cambridge, Mass., and tours with several professional bands. Masuko is a frequent collaborator with Ritter and is featured on her upcoming CD. They trained and worked together at the New England Conservatory of Music.

Local accordionist Toni Naples will also accompany Ritter and Masuko on four pieces composed by Ritter and inspired by the Outer Banks. Naples is featured on Ritter's latest CD, expected to be released in late 2010 under her own label, Zoning Recordings.

Grace Kennedy, a fifth-grader and longtime student of Ritter's, is also scheduled to perform. According to Ritter, the Myers Park Traditional Elementary student has talent that goes beyond the notes in her lyrical sound, individual embellishment and impeccable rhythm.

"She is one of the most versatile performers I've ever taught," Ritter said. "She possesses a high level of both classical and jazz techniques for her age. I'm teaching her left-handed jazz techniques, which I use in adult studies."

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