



*Home & Garden Design*

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# The Almanac

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## More Music @ Menlo



Artistic directors David Finckel and Wu Han are among the performers at the 8th annual music festival [See Section 2]

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# Music@Menlo returns

This year performances move to a third venue: the performing arts center at M-A High

By Joshua Falk

Special to The Almanac

Now in its eighth season, Music@Menlo is thriving. Opening Friday, July 23, and running for three weeks, the chamber music festival will feature 42 of the world's finest musical talents performing 20 concerts, interpreting music by more than 30 composers — from Baroque to contemporary.

Wu Han, a founder and artistic director of the festival, encourages Music@Menlo patrons to “really immerse yourself in the art form.”

As in past years, performances will be held at Menlo School in Atherton and St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Palo Alto. But a third venue has been added this year: the new performing arts center at Menlo-Atherton High School in Atherton.

The theme of this year's festival is “Maps and Legends.” The seven main programs selected by artistic directors Wu Han and her husband David Finckel — who also serve as the artistic directors of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in New York City — show audiences how music has played a defining role in different historical contexts.

The festival opens with two pieces that contrast dramatically musically, but draw on common inspiration. “The Seasons,” the festival's first program, features Vivaldi's strings classic “The Four Seasons,” written in 1723, and George Crumb's “Music for a Summer Evening,” a 1974 piece scored for two amplified pianos and percussion.

The festival's second program, “The English Voice,” includes Britten's “A Charm of Lullabies” as well as Walton's Piano Quartet and Elgar's Piano Quintet in A minor.

“It's like English rock and roll,” said Wu Han of Walton's Piano Quartet. The music in this program is not often programmed, but deserves to be heard, she said.

The third program, “Vienna,” named for the city that was once home to featured composers Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms, and Schoenberg, is “a program that really marks the musical transformation from early Haydn all the way through Schoenberg,” said Wu Han.

Program four features music written in the aftermath of World War II by Richard Strauss, Shostakovich, and Britten, while the fifth program recalls Paris in the 1920s. The sixth features music by some of the most influential Spanish composers around the turn of the 20th century — de



Photo by Tom Bonner/courtesy Music@Menlo

“It's quiet, it's beautiful,” says Wu Han, artistic director of Music@Menlo, of the new performing arts center at Menlo-Atherton High School in Atherton.

Falla, Albeniz, and Turina — along with music by Debussy and Ravel, who were inspired by the work of their Spanish contemporaries.

The festival ends with songs by American composers Henry T. Burleigh, William Bolcom, and Samuel Barber, as well as Dvorak's American string quartet and quintet for two violins, two violas, and cello.

*The programs show audiences how music has played a defining role in different historical contexts.*

“I love running a festival because a festival is a different animal than a regular concert series,” Wu Han said. “The festival is packed with a huge variety and combination.”

Music@Menlo's four Carte Blanche Concerts allow musicians to indulge in special projects of their choosing. These programs are usually quite challenging for the musicians, says Wu Han.

This year's Carte Blanche series will include Schubert's dramatic song cycle Winterreise performed by baritone Randall Scarlata and pianist Gilbert Kalish, as well as a program of Schumann and Chopin works played by pianist Jeffrey Kahane. David Finckel and Wu Han will team up to perform all five Beethoven cello sonatas. The fourth Carte Blanche program will feature a three-part recital by Italian piano virtuoso Alessio Bax.

“It's sort of like building a house,” Wu Han said, describing the challenges of programming a festival. “You have to have a serious library sometimes, and you should have the most delicious kitchen sometimes.”

The festival will also host lectures by prominent music scholars, including a discussion of English musical identity with R. Larry Todd and a lecture on the

rise and fall of Viennese musical culture by Ara Guzelimian, dean of the Juilliard School. Other lectures will delve into Parisian culture in the early 20th century and Dvorak's visit to America.

“We always want to have contextual information to enhance audience understanding and enjoyment of this music,” Wu Han said. “It's like going to a wonderful retreat or a great exploration trip together with your community.”

In fact, Mr. Finckel and Wu Han found that a three-week retreat once a year just wasn't enough.

“A lot of our audience told us that they miss Music@Menlo all year long and they would love to have more contact with our musicians,” Wu Han said. “After eight years we feel — especially after we have the new venue [at Menlo-Atherton High School] — we are in the position to open that opportunity.”

This year Music@Menlo will add a Winter Series of three concerts to augment the three-week summer festival. The Emerson String Quartet, the Grammy-winning ensemble of which Mr. Finckel is a member, will perform in October, followed by a concert featuring pianists Alessio Bax, Anne-Marie McDermott, and Wu Han in January.

The final concert in the series will take place in May and will include works by Mozart, Beethoven, and Schumann performed by pianist Jeffrey Kahane, violinist Arnaud Sussmann, violist Paul Neubauer, and cellist Christopher Costanza.

“There is so much music that people should know and should hear,” Wu Han said. “I also do just have the best Rolodex to get the best musicians to serve this music. It's a joy to be able to provide that.”

Wu Han also praised the festival's new performance space, the performing arts center at M-A High.

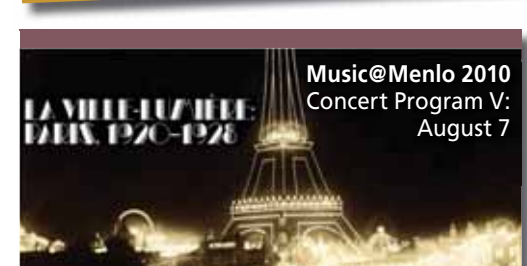
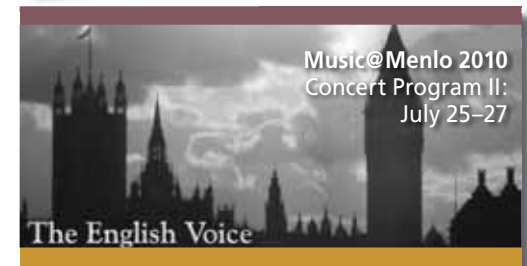
“From a musician's point of view, I'm totally delighted,” she said. “It's quiet, it's beautiful.”

“This will be the first year for the festival community to try out this new space,” she added. “We look forward, actually, to hearing everybody's opinion.”

“It's very inspiring to be at Menlo,” Wu Han said. “We look forward to spending the next up-and-coming three weeks with the Menlo community.” ■

## On the cover

David Finckel and Wu Han are founders, co-artistic directors and performers at the Music@Menlo chamber music festival. They are also husband and wife. Photo by Tristan Cook, courtesy of Music@Menlo.



## More information

The Music@Menlo chamber music festival returns for its eighth season with performances running from Friday, July 23, through Saturday, Aug. 14, at three venues: Menlo School and Menlo-Atherton High School in Atherton, and St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Palo Alto. Go to [musicatmenlo.org](http://musicatmenlo.org) for more information.