

See the music, hear the painting

This year's SABVI fundraiser features both visual and auditory elements

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LANCASTER COUNTY, PA - Brian Norcross' childhood was filled with paintings and music. His father, an artist, was also "a great music lover. When he was painting, there was always music," the director of instrumental music at Franklin & Marshall College said. His idea for "Portraits" -- artists onstage painting on canvas their impressions of the music being played -- came from these experiences with his father.

Dorothy English, development coordinator of Susquehanna Association for the Blind and Vision Impaired, is excited. "Music and art, it's a winning combination to raise funds and awareness for SABVI," she said.

Prior to the concert, artist Robert Fluhr, who teaches blind sculptors at Allen's Lane Art Center in Philadelphia, will give a slide lecture on blind artists. English said the lecture will show that "people who are blind can still be quite independent and can still make works of art."

Fluhr's class is made up of blind and visually impaired people. He said some were blind before being artists and some became blind later, and had to change from painting to sculpture.

"My class is a very serious art class, not just a therapy class. We work in all kinds of material: clay, plaster, wood, stone, papier-mâché. Some works are abstract, some fairly realistic," he said.

The class exhibits four to six times a year, and some works do sell. "One lady sold her piece for \$1,500. That was cheap, but she needed the money. This gives you an idea of some of the quality they produce," Fluhr said.

For Saturday's program, Norcross and a 50-piece orchestra will play highly descriptive compositions: the first four movements from Gustav Holst's "Planets," Aaron Copland's "Lincoln Portrait" and Modest Mussorgsky's well-known "Pictures at an Exhibition."

For Copland's piece, which includes a text by Abraham Lincoln, SABVI president Stephen Patterson will narrate.

The artists, Brian Lehman and Claire Giblin, will be limited to painting during the first piece, "Planets."

Of Holst's composition, Norcross said, "It really is impressions of the spirit of the planets (as envisioned in Greek mythology). Mars is war, Venus is peace, Mercury is speed and Jupiter is joy and frivolity.

"Holst's impressions are what I'll try to create musically, and it will be interesting to see what the artists will come up visually," Norcross said.

Abstract painter Giblin, a co-owner with Ellen Flupe of Pfenninger's Art Gallery

on North Prince Street, echoes Norcross' thoughts. "What will happen Saturday evening? You can't tell how it will go. It's all part of the excitement," she said.

Painting to music is not new to Giblin. In 2003 she experimented while listening to jazz and to Debussy's "Clair de Lune." She said the composer Jan Sibelius had a theory that certain chords correlate with particular colors. She has listened to the first movement of "Planets." "It's about the planet Mars, very strong-sounding. If I paint that, it probably will be in reds, blacks and silvers."

But, she said, "You'll never know. Saturday is an opportunity to further that experimentation. Now I can go back and do the same thing again with even more understanding."

Brian Lehman's work, unlike Giblin's, is more representational. The art teacher at East Petersburg Elementary School is also a set designer. Besides school plays, he designed the sets for Lancaster Opera Company's productions of "Tosca," "Tales of Hoffman," "The Tender Land" and "Madame Butterfly."

He, too, is "very excited" about painting extemporaneously onstage. "Beyond the fact that I want to include the musicians, some evidence of instruments and, at the same time, place the feel of music into the painting through color and line, much like Claire (Giblin) will do it, I really don't know what will come up," he said.

He wants to be experimental and will take along materials traditional artist might not use -- such as cardboard, Styrofoam and plastic -- to collage into the paint.

Both he and Giblin say finishing a painting in 25 minutes -- the length of the four movements in "Planet" -- is a stretch. But whether the works are finished or not, they will be auctioned off during the intermission.

Giblin said, "If the buyer likes, I will finish it later."

But Lehman has other plans. "I plan to be so caught up in the moment that I will finish. To paint it back in my studio, I feel it will ruin the painting because I will no longer be in the moment."

DETAILS

"Portraits," concert to benefit Susquehanna Association for the Blind and Vision Impaired, Sat., child-friendly matinee 2 p.m., pre-concert lecture on blind artists 6:15 p.m., evening performance 7:30 p.m., Barshinger Center for the Arts, Franklin & Marshall College, matinee \$10, \$15, \$20; lecture free, evening performance \$15, \$25, \$30; 291-5951.

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