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## Classics Get a Fresh Face

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CARLSBAD – Matthew McBane’s music has taken him throughout this country and Europe, but the performance he was perhaps most excited for was in the auditorium of Dove Library in his hometown of Carlsbad.

The week of March 3 marked the premier of his Carlsbad Music Festival. The event included live performances at local schools and two nights of concerts in the Schulman Auditorium featuring young professional musicians performing contemporary, classical and improvised chamber music.

To hear the musicians describe it, it was their insular experiences in the classical and chamber music community that compelled them to bring the music beyond the world’s concert halls and into the Carlsbad community.

“Classical music in North County feels old. That’s just the general vibe,” McBane said. “I want exciting performers. If the musicians are enthused, audiences will feel the same.”

The festival was launched with a grant from the Carlsbad Arts Office. It was a project well-suited for the grants, according to Colleen Finnegan, community arts coordinator.

“The idea of bringing back to Carlsbad young musicians who have obtained a certain stature, to perform an innovative series in their own community just delighted us,” Finnegan said.

The festival features the homegrown talent of McBane, cellist Ben Jacobson, 24, cellist Peter Jacobson, 25, and violinist Bridget Dolkas, 32. The four began their musical training with violin lessons with the late local teacher Donna Christmas.

“It’s a group of friends. We hang out, play music and celebrate the music we love,” Peter Jacobson said.

The group was committed to bringing a fresh concert series to Carlsbad, McBane said.

“I want to bring in musicians that are exciting. Not just the ones who have won a lot of competitions but are actually doing creative things.”

Creativity ran high in the festival’s debut program, which blended traditional classical pieces with less-often heard genres and compositions.

The first weekend concert featured usual string quartet fare with pieces by Beethoven and Bartok, followed by the premier of a McBane composition performed by a newly-formed octet.

The next evening, Peter Jacobson's cello joined the melodic rhythms of Afro-Latin percussionist Angel Luis Figueroa and the Freestyle Los Angeles Creative Orchestra.

Does Jacobson's classical background mesh well with Figueroa's African drumming?

"They're totally different ends of the spectrum," Peter Jacobson said.

But for the musicians, that's precisely the point: experimenting and celebrating, while breaking the stereotype of stodgy classical music.

"The festival's been really fun," Peter Jacobson said. "Matt says play any music you want. We can play the music of our choice. That's different from other concerts where you're asked to play certain things."

McBane's vision for the future of the festival is to keep it centered on the core group of Carlsbad performers but to also introduce new talent that is equally enthused about the music.

"We're just hoping to bring a positive, fun vibe so that's it's not just another stiff, classical concert," Peter Jacobson said. "We want to play music people could actually get up and dance to. Then again, I'd be surprised if my parents got up and danced, but it'd make me very happy."