

# The San Diego Union-Tribune.

## Music festival stirs ideas on what's classical

By Marry Curran-Downey

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You know those pictures of rock groups that typically run in Night & Day, the ones with the band members all decked in black, with if not surly then certainly not smiley faces? Usually they are in some outside industrial setting to give them a bit of gritty street cred.

The accompanying story talks about their years playing in dives, fighting for exposure and touring the country in a parent's dilapidated station wagon with nothing but Cheetos and a maxed-out credit card to keep them going and feeding the dream.

The publicity photo for the Calder Quartet, headlining this year's Carlsbad Music Festival, which runs all this week, is a perfect example of the type. Except that instead of the local roadhouse, these musicians made their professional debut at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City. And since their concert schedule has them bouncing from Los Angeles to all points east, they probably are more prone to racking up frequent-flier miles than trying to Mapquest their next gig in the back of the equipment van.

But the Cheetos, well, every musician of a certain age survives on the dangerously cheesy snacks. These guys, darkly brooding, good-looking lads every one, are of that age. They are young and edgy and they play the classics. You don't often see the words chamber music and avant-garde in the same sentence, but that's how the group has made a name for itself, which makes it a perfect fit for its third appearance at the Carlsbad event.

"We're trying to rethink what a music festival can be," said Matt McBane, the Carlsbad-born composer and musician who created the festival, books the acts, raises the money, promotes the event, plays original compositions at the event and, presumably, stacks the chairs and passes out the programs at Dove Library, the site of many of the performances.

"It's not strictly classical and it's not strictly contemporary," McBane said. "It's music that's really compelling, and people really respond to it. They're accessible, but they're really creative, too."

The Calder Quartet will perform an original composition written for them by Ryan Carter, the winner of the festival's first composers competition, an effort to encourage young composers and get their work heard on a new level. The quartet also plans to add the piece to its repertoire as it travels this year.

McBane started the whole thing with an idea and a grant from the Carlsbad Cultural Arts

Office. Through the years, the city has increased its involvement, the county has kicked in a grant and private foundation dollars, and the Carlsbad Rotary has contributed as well. The La Jolla Music Society is co-presenting the Calder Quartet performance.

The East Coast-based NOW Ensemble is new to the festival and on Friday will perform an original piece written for the event by McBane.

“There is a community of composers in their mid-20s to mid-30s, and they only play work written for them,” McBane said.

Which makes sense, when you realize that the group is composed of electric guitar, flute, clarinet, piano and bass.

Saturday is the Calder Quartet concert, and Sunday the festival wraps up with The Ensemble, 20 musicians mainly based in Los Angeles who work as studio musicians and freelancers coming together to perform new and original pieces as well as interpretations of groundbreaking works, including the minimalist classic, “In C” by Terry Riley. They will perform in the Dove Library courtyard.

While the performances are what bring in the crowds, McBane is just as excited by the five days that he and members of the Calder Quartet and other musicians will spend in middle school and high school music classes around town.

“The kids really respond to this,” said McBane, who is only a few years out of those classrooms himself.

After hours spent alone, practicing and perfecting their playing and composition work, the young musicians get a chance to hear what it's like out there in the real world. And they hear it from men and women who have followed their passion, created their own way and, in doing so, made classical cool.