

Andrew Sewell conducts the sounds of summer

The Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra's 33rd summer of Concerts on the Square is just the most visible activity of Andrew Sewell and company

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You're
sure to

encounter a great number and variety of treats at the farmers' market around the Capitol. But quite a few folks would argue that the sweetest summer delights are found on six Wednesday evenings.

Those nights are, of course, the cherished Concerts on the Square, in their third decade with the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra. And their director, Andrew Sewell, can now say he's been there for more than half of them, since he took the helm in May 2000.

Sewell's principal trademark—apart from clean and buoyant readings of everything from Baroque to contemporary repertoire—is his invigorating programming. Expect more of the same this summer. Which is to say a few favorite traditions remain in place, but some major surprises promise to energize the already enthusiastic picnicking/listening crowds of 20,000-plus each week.

The opening event always features the concerto competition winner named in late January; this year it is Liam Mayo, the pianist from Green Bay who was also a finalist in the Madison Symphony's "Final Forte." If you want to see as well as hear joyous music making, be sure to sit where you can watch this 16-year-old revel in the dazzling Piano Concerto No. 1 of Mendelssohn.

The necessity of amplifying the ensemble for outdoor performance means the WCO can play works they wouldn't in their winter home, Overture Center's Capitol Theater. "It's not just that amplification lets us take on bigger works—after all, we always include Tchaikovsky's '1812 Overture,'" Sewell says. (And yes, of course they will again, with cannon, on July 6.) "But the canopy that was added last year has made such a difference. Not only does it reduce the stress level—no one is going to have their instrument harmed by a sudden shower—but it really helps the overall sound quality."

Probably the summer's biggest surprise comes on July 27, when the soloist is Chitravina Ravikiran, who plays the chitravina. Huh? "The man's name is Ravikiran, and the chitravina is a 21-string instrument. Because he has mastered it, he is referred to as what we would translate as 'chitravina-master,'" Sewell explains. "He will play his own arrangements of works by Dikshitar, who is kind of the Beethoven of India—in fact, he lived around the same time as Beethoven, and spent some time in Europe."

Concerts on the Square take place each Wednesday from June 29 to Aug. 3. Performances begin at 7 p.m. and, as always, are free. Whether you bring your own basket or buy your dinner from one of the fabulous food carts surrounding the event, remember: Everything tastes better with music!

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