

Acclaimed violinist Pitcairn plays with famed 'Red' piece

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She owns historic Stradivarius, and she'll appear locally

Elizabeth Pitcairn is coming to town with the famed Stradivarius on which the movie “The Red Violin” was based. The violin is more than a half-century older than the United States itself and is shrouded in history and mystery.

Pitcairn will play the “Red Mendelssohn” with the Portland Columbia Symphony Orchestra, which performs at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Nov. 21, in First United Methodist Church, 1838 S.W. Jefferson St., Portland, and at 3 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 23 in Mt. Hood Community College, 26000 S.E. Stark St. in Gresham. For tickets/info: columbiasymphony.org.

In addition to Pitcairn’s showcase piece, John Corigliano’s “Chaconne for Violin & Orchestra from ‘The Red Violin,’” the orchestra will also play Bach’s “Toccatina and Fugue in D minor” (as orchestrated by Stokowski) as well as Elgar’s “Enigma Variations, Op. 38.”

Pitcairn will also talk about her violin prior to a showing of the movie, at 6:15 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 20, in the Hollywood Theatre, 4122 N.E. Sandy Blvd. Tickets are \$10, or \$35 for VIP. For more information: hollywoodtheatre.org/the-red-violin/.

The violin Pitcairn plays was made in 1720 by the famed Italian craftsman Antonio Stradivari. Not long after its creation, the instrument vanished for more than 200 years, finally resurfacing in 1930s Berlin, purchased by an heir to the composer, Felix Mendelssohn.

An industrialist bought “The Red Mendelssohn” in 1956 and owned it until it sold at an auction in 1990 for \$1.7 million. This auction inspired the 1999 Academy Award-winning movie “The Red Violin.” In real life, Pitcairn’s grandfather had purchased the violin at the auction and gave it to her.

“I was a senior in high school, two weeks away from my 17th birthday,” Pitcairn says. “I started violin at age 3 and was practicing three to four hours a day by age 12. My mother, a Juilliard trained cellist, says I asked to play violin when I saw her performing in a piano trio.”

Pitcairn took to the famous violin immediately.

“Every race car driver needs a fast car, every show jumper needs a great horse and every soloist needs a beautiful and powerful instrument,” she says, noting that the violin has qualities that separate it from other violins.

“It has extraordinary quality of tone, ease of execution and power of projection that separates it from other violins,” she says. “My other favorite part of owning this violin is the ability to put it in the hands of a serious young violinist and watch the way their eyes light up — ‘Oh, wow!’ is about all they can get out, but a few moments of hearing that special Strad sound under the ear

is enough to remember forever.”

Pitcairn has performed “Chaconne” before and looks forward to sharing it with Portland and Gresham audiences.

“It is exciting, it has beautiful melodies, and I always find something new in the score to bring out,” she says. “Corigliano’s father was a violinist, and he understands very well how to write for the violin.”

Pitcairn also offers these tips to aspiring violinists:

“Practice scales everyday. Record yourself. Practice slowly for perfection. Practice the hardest parts first. Do not be discouraged. It is a humbling experience to attempt to achieve perfection on the violin.”



Photo Credit: COURTESY OF CHRISTIAN STEINER - Her grandfather bought Elizabeth Pitcairn the Red Mendelssohn violin just before her 17th birthday.



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