

CCO enlists NKU artist for multimedia 'Creation'



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(Photo: The Enquirer/Janelle Gelfand)

A multimedia collaboration between the Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra, Northern Kentucky University's Brad McCombs and Cincinnati Art Museum is an example of the growing importance of partnerships in the performing arts.

On Saturday, the Chamber Orchestra presents Darius Milhaud's jazzy "La Création du Monde" ("The Creation of the World"), part of a program conducted and curated by Sarah Ioannides, a candidate for music director. McCombs, Schiff professor of art and coordinator for New Media Art at NKU, has created a video to accompany the music.



Paul Gauguin's Mahana Ma'a (1892, oil on canvas) represents the Garden of Eden in Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra's "The Creation of the World." Bequest of John W. Warrington, 1996.466 (Photo: Provided/Cincinnati Art Museum)

"I think there's a desire to be more collaborative, and it coincided perfectly with our new School of the Arts at NKU," said McCombs, whose own work spans the arts college and the cutting-edge College of Informatics on the NKU campus. "We're no longer just visual arts, music, theater and dance. In the arts, we've got these silos. By breaking down some of those silos, we see crossovers – not only by creating a new work of art that's engaging different areas, but also by exposing people to different disciplines."

Written in 1923 for the Swedish Ballet, Milhaud's "Creation of the World" is the creation story based on African folk mythology. The composer, one of the famous "French Six" in 1920s Paris, was inspired by jazz he had heard in Harlem. The result is one of the great fusions of classical and jazz of the early 20th century.

Because it was originally a ballet, the piece seemed tailor-made for a visual element. McCombs and Ioannides met at the Cincinnati Art Museum to "co-curate" art that would work for the video. The artists include Pablo Picasso, Paul Gauguin, Joan Miro, Marc Chagall, Robert S. Duncanson, and Gustav Klimt. There are primitive African sculptures as well as the sculpture "Statue of Eve" by Hiram Powers. In addition, Ioannides contributed several of her own paintings.



An image from the video by Brad McCombs for "La Creation du Monde," depicting an African creation myth. (Photo: Provided/Brad McCombs)

McCombs created work to accompany the Overture, which describes "chaos," the period before creation. Using cotton candy to form surreal peaks and valleys, he photographed it using time-lapse technique as the substance slowly dissolved down to nothing in the air. Then he reversed the footage, so that it appears to grow.



One of the dream-like visuals created by Brad McCombs for the Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra (Photo: Provided/Brad McCombs)

"Most of my work is focused on contemporary practice, and is very conceptually-driven," said McCombs, who has created sculptural installations, digital videos and even robotic works. He has exhibited nationally and internationally, including at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris. Locally, his installation, "Adrift," was part of "Too

Shallow for Diving: The Weight of Water," at the Aronoff Center's Weston Art Gallery last year.

It is just one element of Ioannides' ambitious program, which includes the world premiere of "Caribbean Rhapsody," performed by saxophonist James Carter. Carter will also play the prominent saxophone part in Milhaud's "Creation of the World."

It was important that the visuals not overshadow the music, McCombs said.

The challenge, he said, "is to approach it in a way where there's dialogue and collaboration happening, so that everyone feels like they're part of creating the piece, and it doesn't seem weighted one way or another."

If you go

What: Saxophone Fusion. Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra, Sarah Ioannides, conductor; James Carter, saxophone

When: 8 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 27. Ioannides gives the Prelude Talk at 7:15 p.m.

Where: Corbett Theater, School for Creative and Performing Arts, Over-the-Rhine

On Sunday: A Little Afternoon Musik, with Ioannides and saxophonist Carter, plus an art tour featuring art used in the video. 4 p.m., Cincinnati Art Museum

Tickets: 513-723-1182, ccocincinnati.org