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Concerts pair music with venues that reflect history

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Evan Leslie, shown in the U.S. Custom House in Galveston, is one of the organizers of a series of chamber music concerts at historical buildings.

Originally, the idea had nothing to do with Hurricane Ike.

The plan was to highlight Galveston's history by performing a series of chamber music concerts in significant buildings and choosing the music to match the architecture.

But then Ike blew through in September, and the plan faltered as supporters' homes were destroyed and venues flooded.

In the aftermath, the directors of **Restoration Chamber Music** regrouped and planned concerts, some of them in venues hobbled by the storm, said **Evan Leslie**, one of the series' directors.

As they worked on the programs after the storm, their efforts gained new purpose.

"I think now it has extra meaning," Leslie said. "The concerts are a celebration of Galveston rather than just cool

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The chamber music series celebrating Galveston's historical architecture in concert begins Friday with a performance on the ground floor of the **U.S. Custom House**, a building that took nearly 8 feet of water during the hurricane.

Performers for the concerts include the series directors, Leslie, a cellist; **Brinton Averil Smith**, principal cellist of the **Houston Symphony**; and **Evelyn Chen**, a pianist based in Houston and New York City.

Performers from the symphony and other area groups will also perform.

The first concert highlights Galveston's history as the third-busiest point of entry for immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The U.S. Custom House, built in 1861, was a stopping point for newcomers to the United States and later a place where they were able to become citizens.

The music on the program includes works by Rachmaninoff, who came to the United States from Russia, and **Kurt Weill**, who fled the Nazis in Europe and settled in America to become one of the great writers of Broadway songs.

"I like the idea of all these composers becoming a little different, perhaps even involuntarily, because they were in a different place," said Leslie, who pioneered the idea for the series.

The second concert is in the Garten Verein, a circular dance pavilion created for a social society of German immigrants in 1880.

The music includes works by Brahms, Strauss and Schumann. It also focuses on the musical friendships between Brahms and violinist **Joseph Joachim** and between **Robert Schumann** and **Clara Wieck**, who became his wife.

The final concert will be held in St. Joseph's Church. The little wooden church, built in 1859, is a survivor of the 1900 hurricane and Hurricane Ike.

Its fortitude will be marked in music by Beethoven's Opus 132 string quartet, a work composed after the composer had struggled with a serious illness toward the end of his life.

The work is considered a testament to his recovery.

"It seems like this piece is a really great celebration of Galveston's resilient spirit, too," Leslie said.

The chamber music series is performed at a time when the island city is in the process of figuring out what it will be in the aftermath of Hurricane Ike, said **Dwayne Jones**, executive director of the **Galveston Historical Foundation**, which is working with the music series to put on the concerts and which will benefit from the proceeds.

"A lot of people in Texas and beyond have forgotten we had a hurricane last September," Jones said.

"But the people of Galveston have not. We are seeing what we are going to be after the storm and establishing ourselves again."

Of the concert series, Jones said, "It shows for someone like me, who is not a performing artist, the depth of what a performance can be. It gives whole new interpretation to an historic building."

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The series also allows audience members to experience music in settings beyond the confines of the traditional concert hall and perhaps introduce them to new works and new settings, said Smith, who also teaches cello at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music.

"Really, these pieces were not written to be played in a sterile concert hall environment," Smith said.

"We are always looking for ways to get chamber music back into intimate settings."

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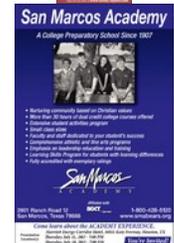
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