

## **Emerald City Music explores connections between classical music and jazz**

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Kristin Lee, artistic director of Emerald City Music. (Lauren Desberg)

By [Gemma Alexander](#)

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If you think chamber music only means musicians playing centuries-old polite melodies on a harpsichord, violinist Kristin Lee would like to have a word with you. Or even better, she wants to show you, through Emerald City Music's concert series, just how varied and innovative chamber music can be.

On Oct. 20, [Emerald City Music](#) will open its eighth season with "Evolution of Improvisation," a musical program combining classical chamber music and jazz. The first of seven programs that explore musical connections, ECM will perform this and subsequent concerts for one night each in Seattle and in Olympia.

"We wanted to bring a program that is really limitless in terms of genre and that's how the 'Evolution' series came about," said Lee, artistic director of the Emerald City Music concert series. The annual "Evolution" concert launched two years ago with a performance tracing the history of keyboards through harpsichord, piano and synthesizer. This year's "Evolution" explores how improvisation connects classical music to jazz.

"Improv is really associated with the world of jazz today. However, if you look back at the celebrated composers from hundreds of years ago, improvisation was a key element to how they conceived their compositions," said Lee. "During their time, patrons were hosting duels to see who was a better improviser."

Lee partnered with producer and bass player Anthony Tidd (who has worked with artists from Lady Gaga to the Black Eyed Peas) to develop the "Evolution of Improvisation" program. It's a collaboration that has been years in the making.

“Anthony is very much an essential part of why I believe in good music and not particular genres,” said Lee. The two first met while working on the [Philly-Paris Lockdown](#), a concert project begun in 2011 by The Roots (house band on “The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon”) that incorporated widely varied musical styles.

For “Evolution of Improvisation,” Tidd developed the jazz portion of the program while Lee selected classical works by Bach, Beethoven and Mozart.

“There are opportunities for improvisation and adding ornaments, and there are stories behind these works where improvisation was an essential part of how these pieces were conceived. There are stories that Beethoven basically performed the premiere of the Kreutzer violin sonata, which is on this program, half-improvised because he hadn’t quite finished the piece,” said Lee, who will play violin alongside pianist Julio Elizalde. They will alternate with solo and ensemble jazz improvisations by Tidd, guitarist Miles Okazaki, drummer Dafnis Prieto and saxophonist Steve Coleman.

“It’s a program that I personally have never seen done before. It’s going to be very, very different,” laughs Lee. “Very different” is a descriptor that often applies to ECM concerts. Their December concert will feature Balinese gamelan, and in May, film and chamber music will combine to explore the connection between mothers and their children.

“Our core mission is to bring chamber music — meaning that it’s intimate and a smaller ensemble — but we always had a vision that we wanted to change that perception that it has to be old music or music of a particular genre. We are living in a time where we can really learn how to appreciate all forms of great music regardless of genre,” said Lee.

Lee co-founded the Emerald City Music concert series with executive director Andrew Goldstein to make chamber music more accessible and interesting to a younger, broader audience.

“We wanted to do something that has a little bit of a different vibe than a traditional concert setting,” said Lee. They chose the intimate 415 Westlake venue in South Lake Union to create that nontraditional atmosphere. Tickets include drinks from the bar, which patrons are welcome to take to their seats. The venue doesn’t have a stage separating performers from the audience, and artists mingle with the audience during the intermission.

“We have deep love for chamber music. We really believe in this art form, not only because of the music itself, but also, we think that it’s a very powerful tool to bring communities and people together,” said Lee.

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### “Evolution of Improvisation”

·8 p.m. Oct. 20; 415 Westlake at 415 Westlake Ave. N., Seattle; \$40-\$55; accessibility: no stairs, room for walkers and wheelchair seating near the stage, accessible restrooms and wide aisles.

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