

## **Salina Symphony to Present Dazzling Concerto Featuring Accordion Soloist**

By GARY DEMUTH

The Salina Symphony's long roster of guest soloists have included violinists, cellists, pianists and brass instrument virtuosos.

For its season closing concert, the Symphony will showcase a soloist whose instrument isn't usually associated with a classical orchestra – Hanzhi Wang, a rising superstar on the accordion.

That's right, the accordion, known more for polkas than pastorales.

Wang will open the Salina Symphony's "Tango Classic" concert with a performance of a classical composition inspired by the beats and rhythm of Argentine Tango, the dazzling Concerto for Bandoneon "Aconcagua" by Astor Piazzolla.

Yaniv Segal, conductor and music director for the Salina Symphony, said Piazzolla is an Argentine composer who originally wrote the piece for the Bandoneon, an instrument used in many Argentina tango ensembles with similarities to the accordion but with buttons on both sides and no register switches common to the accordion.

"It's a very difficult instrument to play," he said. "(Piazzolla) also expects the soloist to embellish in the tradition of tango, which is improvisationally done. It's all about leading and following and showing your artistry."

Wang, a highly accomplished young artist on the accordion, will be a dynamic interpreter of Piazzolla's challenging composition, Segal said.

"It's my first time working with an accordionist with the orchestra," he said. "She comes highly recommended as a unique talent."

The Salina Symphony's "Tango Classic" begins at 4 p.m. May 5 at the Stiefel Theatre for the Performing Arts, 151 S. Santa Fe.

The program also will feature "Black Swan," contemporary composer Bright Sheng's lyrical tribute to the great composer Johannes Brahms, and concludes with Brahms' own majestic "Symphony No. 1," a composition featuring thrilling melodic twists and turns brought to fruition by Brahms' unique harmonic language, rich orchestrations and memorable melodic structure.

### **Accordion ambassador**

A tireless ambassador for the accordion, Hanzhi Wang has been praised for her captivating stage presence and performances of passion and finesse.

Acclaimed for what critics have called her "staggering virtuosity," Wang is the only accordionist to win a place on the roster of Young Concert Artists in the organization's 60-year history.

A first-place winner of the 2017 Young Concert Artists Susan Wadsworth International Auditions, Wang made her New York debut in The Peter Marino Concert at Carnegie Hall. She also opened the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Young Artists series at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

“The YCA is a nonprofit agency in New York City that runs a competition for young artists each year,” Segal said. “I believe it is really important young artists have opportunities to perform with orchestras. I intend to have a young artist perform with (the Salina Symphony) at least once a year.”

Wang has appeared as soloist with numerous orchestras throughout the U.S., including the Oregon Music Festival Orchestra, Victoria Symphony, Hawaii Symphony, the Erie Philharmonic and the Reno Chamber Orchestra. She also performs numerous recitals and chamber music concerts and has conducted lectures and Master Classes at the Manhattan School of Music, Royal Danish Academy of Music and in Norway and Portugal.

This upcoming season, she will embark on a coast-to-coast tour with mandolin sensation Avi Avital, which includes a performance presented by the New York Philharmonic.

Wang earned a bachelor’s degree at the China Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and completed her master’s degree and received a soloist diploma from the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen under the tutelage of renowned accordion professor Geir Draugsvoll.

“I don’t know (Wang), so it will be interesting to find out how she came to the accordion,” Segal said. “It’s exciting, because we started this season combining jazz with classical, and now we’re introducing the accordion into the classical world.”

### **Tribute to Brahms**

Also included in the season finale concert will be a composition written as a tribute to Brahms, followed by a symphony by the master himself.

“Black Swan” was written by acclaimed composer and teacher Bright Sheng, who Segal said was his master’s thesis professor at the University of Michigan.

“It’s a piece for piano and orchestra that’s lush and gorgeous,” Segal said. “It’s an honor to conduct this piece by my former professor.”

Brahm’s own First Symphony was written under great pressure, taking nearly 20 years to complete. Its long gestation was a result of the composer’s obsessive perfectionism and the vast shadow cast by his predecessor and the man considered to be Germany’s greatest composer, Ludwig van Beethoven.

Brahms was considered the “heir apparent” to Beethoven and was expected to produce a symphony of similar scope and power to the great master, an expectation Brahms felt he could not fulfill, Segal said.

“He was writing with a great weight on his shoulders,” Segal said. “He was also a perfectionist on a level almost no one else was. He agonized over every note.”

Yet the result was a masterpiece, Segal said, a monumental and deeply moving work in which Brahms made his own unique mark on the classical world.

“Brahms started by paying tribute to Beethoven,” he said. “He acknowledged that Beethoven was the master, but he put his own stamp on his work.”

### **Pre-concert talk**

Segal will host a “Tango Classic” pre-concert talk beginning at 3 p.m. in the Stiefel Theatre’s Watson Room. Those attending are requested to enter through the theatre’s main doors, which open at 2:30 p.m.

Tickets for the concert are \$35 and \$42 for adults and \$25 for students and may be purchased at the Stiefel Theatre box office, by calling 785-827-1998 or online at [www.salinasymphony.org](http://www.salinasymphony.org).

Segal said plans for next season are nearly complete, and he is excited to bring more diverse classical and contemporary pieces to Salina audiences along with several acclaimed soloists.

“I’m so grateful for what we have in Salina, what we’re able to do – it’s really wonderful,” he said. “It’s a continual idea of presenting something for everyone, the new and the familiar. It’s been a lot of fun to put together with this orchestra.”

For more information about the Salina Symphony, call 785-823-8309 or visit [salinasymphony.org](http://salinasymphony.org).