

The Journal

“Growing Young, Growing Wise” to premiere in New Ulm

Original work based on New Ulm stories



Staff photo by Connor Cummiskey Molly Hennig (left) and Peter Michael von der Nahmer (right) rehearse the song “It’s a World of Repetition” at The Grand Center for Arts and Culture.

NEW ULM — New Ulm’s visiting composer will be showing off the culmination of the time he spent here on Saturday, Aug. 26.

Peter Michael von der Nahmer’s *“Musical Tales Concerto: Growing*

Young, Growing Wise” is slated to start at 7 p.m. at the State Street Theater. Tickets are \$5 and can be purchased online or at the door.

“I really love all of the pieces that you are going to see,” von der Nahmer said. *“I am attached to all of them.”*

For visitor’s to The Grand Center for Arts and Culture’s First Sunday concert this August, the show may be somewhat familiar.

It will follow the story of *“Wind and the Sweet German Boy”* written by von der Nahmer’s friend Marianna Mott Newirth.



Staff photo by Connor Cumiskey Peter Michael von der Nahmer sits outside The Grand Center for Arts and Culture, where he has lived and worked for the two, two-week periods that made up his visiting composer grant.

The story is broken up by a series of songs, stories, dances and more that explore German-American heritage in New Ulm.

“Each of the pieces will have different ways to get into them and I do not

want long talks because I find them, myself, boring always and they always take you out of the theatrical moment,” von der Nahmer said.

This hybridized format has created new and unique challenges for the director, Michael Koester. He was brought on board when Grand Board Vice-Chair Grace Hennig introduced him to von der Nahmer.

“It is not traditional musical theater, or regular theater at that,” Koester said. *“It is a very creative process from beginning to end, almost like you are not sure what the end product is going to look like.”*

It departs from what Koester is used to directing during his time with the State Street Theater Company (SSTC) and Martin Luther College (MLC), because it only just being written and has never been performed before.



Staff photo by Connor Cummiskey Melissa Siegmann (left), Director Michael Koester (middle) and Robin Larson (right) go over scripts and music scores during rehearsal at The Grand Center for Arts and Culture.

The truth in the stories also entices Koester, he said. The stories are written by New Ulm residents.

“Because all of these pieces are original pieces written by the people of New Ulm, almost all of them are true stories – especially the senior pieces that are based on interviews that Michael did with senior citizens in New Ulm – definitely gives it another level of enjoyment because you are not just pretending to do something some writer wrote down and made up a story,” Koester said. *“You are retelling these actual stories that really happened.”*

To do them justice, Koester has chosen to keep the set, costumes and other spectacle to a minimum, he said.

“As soon as the audience focuses on the set piece or the costume then we have lost their focus on the story,” Koester said. *“Anything that we add has to be focused on what the people are saying and what the actual story is.”*

Much of the show is anticipated to be a narrator speaking with silent actors portraying the action on stage.

“Growing Young, Growing Wise” is funded by a \$15,000 visiting composer grant from the American Composers forum on behalf of the McKnight Foundation.

The grant allowed von der Nahmer to live in New Ulm and get to know the community for two month-long stints from May 8 to June 12 and from July 23 to August 28.

“Having Mike (or PMvdN) here has been an amazing experience for us,” Executive Director Anne Makepeace said. *“This is the first time the Grand has had an artist in residence and to have a musician of this caliber live and work in our arts center, has truly been an honor.”*

The composer has enjoyed his time here. He considers this to be a unique opportunity for him to experiment with how he collects stories and does

research.

“The way that I could work here and because I could try so many things because I was in a safe environment and I do not need to show it on Broadway and so on, like the senior pieces, there were so many things that I could try,” von der Nahmer said.

He could experiment more due to the community in town. In particular, von der Nahmer said he will miss Dr. Ann Vogel, who befriended him when he got here.

“The interesting thing was that she was really the main angle for me to get into the city itself, besides George Glotzbach,” von der Nahmer said.

He said he would miss their 3 a.m. phone calls and being able to walk through natural settings like parks that New York City does not have.

“I came as an outsider, so I was totally a stranger to all of (the town),” von der Nahmer said. *“They did not know me, I did not know them and they really, in a short amount of time, gave me the feeling that I belonged to the community, which is difficult sometimes.”*

The experience has affected von der Nahmer’s work, he said. He expects to use the information gathered here for lectures with scientists, music therapists and other professionals in Germany.

“It is beyond just having a normal composer residency,” von der Nahmer said. *“It really brought me further as a scientist and a researcher in my field.”*

Once he departs on Aug. 28, von der Nahmer will be working on a few projects. They include: a youth musical in Germany premiering in spring of 2018, a musical piece for a 170-person high school choir and an opera about the dangers of Twitter with his friend Newirth.

“I am really, very, very grateful for all of the support that I got and all of the time they gave to me, spent with me learning from them, working

with them,” von der Nahmer said. “I really appreciate all of the time from the people that I got from this town.”

Tickets are available at eventbrite.com. Search for “*Musical Tales Concerto: Growing Young, Growing Wise.*”

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