



Abby Wasserman

## The New Sound of Old Instruments

Valley of the Moon laureate Rachel Wong, left, with pianist Christian De Luca and cellist Madeleine Boussou, both apprentices this year

**TALIAN PIANIST CHRISTIAN DE LUCA**, a recent graduate of Juillard's master's program, likes musical puzzles. He concertizes on modern grand pianos, but what lights his fire these days is the fortepiano, the piano of Mozart and Beethoven's day.

He'll have a chance to play two original fortepianos during this year's Valley of the Moon Music Festival – July 14-29 at the Hanna Boys Center Auditorium in Sonoma – as part of the festival's Apprenticeship Program. This year's other apprentices include cellist Madeleine Boussou, violist Lauren Nelson, and violinists Sara Belle and Susannah Foster.

The festival, unique in the country, focuses on chamber works from the Classical-Romantic era (1700-1850) performed on historically authentic instruments. Festival founders and co-directors Tanya Tomkins, cello, and Eric Zivian, fortepiano, are committed to creating opportunities for younger musicians through coaching and collaborations with older

musicians. Each apprentice will work one-on-one with teachers of long experience in historical performance, including Tomkins, Zivian, and master violinists Elizabeth Blumerstock and Monica Huggatt.

Historically authentic instruments include cellos, violas, and violins with gut strings and horsehair bows, and fortepianos with their subtler voices and quicker sound decay. With no recording equipment in the 18th and 19th centuries, it's impossible to know just how the music sounded – but, Zivian says, "We're excited to come closer to the sound as it was when the pieces were written. It opens up new worlds of sound and allows us to feel the expressiveness of the piece differently."

Former apprentices are returning this year as laureates. Bulgarian violinist Tomaliev (2016) and violinists Rachel Wong and Andrew Gonzalez (2017) will perform with their former tutors. New Yorker Wong says her apprentice experience was the best

she's had at any festival. Trained to play the most technically difficult and showy of violin music, she found new depth and direction as an apprentice. "All the coaches said, 'You can play anything, but you need to be a smart musician. It's not about being able to play all the notes; that is not the point of music,'" she recalls. "Being trained in historical performance deepens your thinking about the context of the music, who the composer was, what was happening when he composed the piece, what he was going through, how it would have sounded in his time."

Works to be performed – Mozart, Hummel, Beethoven, Brahms, Hugo Wolff, early Schoenberg, and more – are gems of the repertoire, but Tomkins promises that their sound on historical instruments will reveal something new, even radical, to audiences. [S](#)

[valleyofthemoonmusicfestival.org](http://valleyofthemoonmusicfestival.org)

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