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CULTURE MUSIC ARTS

'It's a different energy': Fire work comes with strings attached

By Nick Galvin

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When Sonja Schebeck was 14 and already a very promising young violinist, a somewhat left-field thought occurred to her.

"I tried to light my bow on fire for an effect," she says. "I just thought it would be cool."



Members of the Freestyle Orchestra have a red-hot go. CHRISTOPHER PEARCE

Luckily, the bow she used was only a cheap student model and the family home survived her experiments, but it was the beginning of a passion for combining fire and music that has stayed with her ever since.

Now Schebeck is set to star in a new work, *Tale of the Firebird*, a unique combination of circus acrobatics, fire stunts and classical music.

The work, part of a program called *Concertos on Fire*, is composed by her close friend and collaborator, Chloe Charody.

The pair first met at the Sydney Conservatorium and the early signs were far from promising.



Composer Chloe Charody is combining circus and classical music.

“We’re both completely opposite types of people,” says the extrovert Charody. “I was like, ‘No way will it work for us to work together’.”

Then Schebeck led the orchestra for the premiere of a Charody piano concerto and the unlikely pair have collaborated ever since.

“To this day we are still working together,” says Charody, who works and lives part of the year in Berlin. “It somehow works. It’s hard sometimes to find someone who understands creatively what you are about. We fight like cat and dog and we’re awful to each other in rehearsals but in the end it does work.”

Charody’s career has involved developing a “niche medium” combining circus and classical music.

“I was always very bored by the stale classical music presentation,” she says. “It has never been my thing.

“At the end of the day the music comes first but I want to create a show that I want to go and see. As I’m conceiving the music I’m also conceiving the visuals, the costumes and even the lighting. It all comes together at the same time.”

Concertos on Fire, which also includes Ross Edwards’ familiar Maninyas violin concerto, will be performed by Schebeck and the unique Freestyle Orchestra, described as an “interdisciplinary acrobatic ensemble”.

“We like to train to be able to do things that shouldn’t be possible,” says Schebeck, who has also toured with Nigel Kennedy. “I can get a different reaction from the audience with fire than I can do with violin. It adds a different dimension. It’s a different energy.”

Concertos on Fire, City Recital Hall, Angel Place, June 7



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