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# Two guest pianists, Jean-Efflam and Andrea Bavouzet, to grace stage with New Bedford Symphony April 9

Jean-Efflam and Andrea Bavouzet join NBSO to offer unusual works Saturday

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Jean-Efflam Bavouzet will play Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand Saturday evening with the NBSO, and will be joined by his wife Andrea for Poulenc's Concerto for Two Pianos in D Minor. COURTESY PHOTOS



Zoom

By Keith Powers  
Contributing writer

Posted Apr. 7, 2016 at 2:01 AM

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A young French pianist took the stage with the New Bedford Symphony Orchestra in 2004, performing the third Prokofiev concerto. At first everyone wondered who he was, but the flamboyant pianist won over the audience with terrific playing and an easy manner.

More than a decade has passed, and since his NBSO debut Jean-Efflam Bavouzet has performed with many of the major orchestras in the world. His 2011 performance of the same concerto with the Boston Symphony Orchestra received an equally warm response, and now he returns to New Bedford for an even more ambitious program.

Bavouzet plays two concertos this Saturday evening — but he has some help with one of them. Bavouzet's wife Andrea Nemecz Bavouzet will join him onstage for Poulenc's Concerto for Two Pianos — an action-packed amalgam of jazz inspirations, gamelan percussion sounds and just plain fun. Jean-Efflam also tackles Ravel's Concerto for the Left-Hand — a work that, despite its unusual limitations for the soloist, ranks among the most virtuosic and complete concertos of the 20th century.

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Jean-Efflam Bavouzet will play Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand Saturday evening with the NBSO, and will be joined by his wife Andrea for Poulenc's Concerto for Two Pianos in One Handed Works are rare — more on that later



One-handed works are rare — but the two-piano and four-hand for one piano literature has a long history. In the days before recorded music, many of the great symphonies and even whole operas were rewritten as reductions, so that families could enjoy them at the piano. As a result, virtuosic works in keyboard arrangements were much more common.

Poulenc's work doesn't exactly fit into that category. Written in 1932, the French composer was out to explore percussive possibilities, and employing two pianos in front of an orchestra enabled that perfectly.

Jean-Efflam sees the work as a discourse. "With two of the same instrument, it's a dialogue folding in, one on another. It's like a split personality — sort of Florestan and Eusebius in conversation," he says, referring to Schumann's fictional characters representing the active and passive, or introverted and extroverted, aspects of personality.

The Poulenc concerto also incorporates the flavors of gamelan, the Balinese percussive tradition that had swept through Europe in the early 20th century. Ravel and Debussy had loved the style before Poulenc, who uses its layers of rhythm to create a jazzy and sometimes humorous effect.

"Poulenc succeeded in a kaleidoscopic kind of writing," Jean-Efflam says. "It's a very personal language, recognizable in a few seconds."

The Bavouzets do not perform together that often — "we last played the Poulenc in Dublin, in 2012," Jean-Efflam says. "But at our home in Normandy we do like to read through a large repertoire — Schubert, Brahms, Weber, even the four-hand versions of Beethoven, Schumann and Liszt symphonies."

Ravel's Left-Hand Concerto has a different origin. The great piano virtuoso Paul Wittgenstein lost his right arm in combat during World War I, but was determined to continue his career. He commissioned a number of works, not just from Ravel but from Britten, Hindemith, Strauss, Prokofiev and Korngold — to explore the one-hand possibilities.

Not all were successes, but the Ravel concerto is a marvel.

"There are many aspects to admire in this concerto," says Jean-Efflam, who counts the work "among the most important piano concertos of the past century.

"Clearly his ambition was to give the illusion that five fingers can be as powerful as an orchestra. Apart from its highly dramatic rhetoric, this concerto is a masterpiece of musical architecture.

"Although Ravel was rather a poor pianist himself," Jean-Efflam says, "he wrote so well for the left hand alone that if you close your eyes you hear not two but three hands."

The concert also includes Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony. Music director David MacKenzie gives a pre-concert lecture about the program at 6:30 p.m. in the Penler Space at the Zeiterion.

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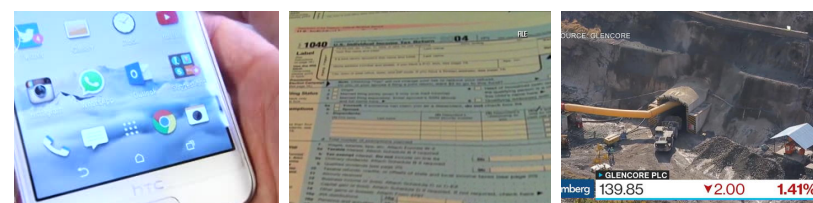
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Wednesday, April 6, 2016						
	<b>UMass MFA 2016 Exhibition</b>					9:00 am
University Art Gallery						
	<b>Where the Land Meets the Sea, 2016 :Working to Restore &amp; Maintain the Health of the Buzzards Bay Watershed</b>					6:00 pm
New Bedford Whaling Museum						
	<b>Awakening Faith: Reconnecting with Your Catholic Faith</b>					7:00 pm
St. Mary's Church						
	<b>Freetown VFW Bean Bag Toss</b>					7:00 pm
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