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STL BEACON

Symphony and Pulitzer Foundation team up for unique series

In Performing Arts

By Elizabeth Harris Krasnoff, special to the Beacon

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Harmony takes on a whole new meaning — and sound — when the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts hosts its 2012-13 St. Louis Symphony Series.

These five concerts are some of the hottest tickets in town. So much so that even though some are still months away, the entire series could be sold out in the not-too-distant future.

What makes these concerts special?

For so many, it is the intimacy of the location, says Eddie Silva, external affairs and publications manager for the Symphony.



File photo

From a previous Symphony-Pulitzer series

Where: Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, 3716 Washington Blvd.

When: 7:30 p.m., Sept. 19, Oct. 24, Feb. 6, March 6, May 1

Cost: \$20 (\$10 students) at stlsymphony.org or by calling 314-534-1700

"In Tadao Ando's extraordinary architectural space, there is not only a warmth of atmosphere but a warmth of sound that one would not expect from walls of concrete," Silva said. "The audience is right there with the musicians, hearing music — almost without exception — that they are not going to hear anywhere else."

Having the opportunity to see and hear the Symphony up close is one thing. But to have the experience in the modern home of the Pulitzer Foundation — that reinvents the experience. Its minimalist backdrop offers a very real, almost pure, experience that is unique to the space.

It provides a thoroughly modern backdrop to some of the most innovative and edgy pieces modern

classical music has to offer.

The space's design actually illustrates the value and mission of the series, said Pulitzer Foundation Director Kristina Van Dyke. It is meant "to explore with musical means the unique possibilities Tadao Ando's space provides: an intimate and contemporary setting to experience music, art, and architecture.

"David's concerts do something very similar to what we do," she said. "Yes, there is a following [for both entities], but there are people who come and are just curious."

Van Dyke describes these concerts in experiential terms. "These concerts are available to anyone who is curious," she said. "There is no requirement that you have to love it and that is part of the freedom you have with these."

Both the venue and the concert offer the opportunity for exploration.

That exploration begins Sept. 19 with the Wednesday-concert-series opener, featuring two piano concertos, otherwise known as music for four hands, and consists of Maurice Ravel's "Mother Goose," Claude Debussy's "En blanc et noir" and John Adams "Hallelujah Junction." Ravel wrote the "Ma Mère l'Oye Suite" in 1908 and orchestrated it in 1912. More than 60 years later, in 1975, Jerome Robbins adapted it for the New York City Ballet's Ravel Festival. It later came to be known by its English title.

From Ravel, audiences will encounter Debussy's impressionistic piece that uses music to play with light much as impressionist painters and poets explored art. Through chords and crescendo, structure and sound, Debussy presents a mood designed to bring his audience through the nuances of space and feeling.

His experimentation and approach was widely shunned at the time he created it. One contemporary even referred to his works as "atrocities" because they lacked the setting and storyline that were major elements at the time.

While Debussy asks his audience to feel its way through his piece, American composer John Adams takes inspiration from a down-to-earth piece of Americana and celebrates developing America in the 20th Century.

Named for a truck stop near the California-Nevada border, Adams' "Hallelujah Junction" also refers to the interaction between the two pianos as the "junction" and the echo effect through the syllables of the word Hallelujah.

The next concert features an Italian invasion of sorts. On Oct. 24, the audience will be treated to Franco Donatoni and two of his pupils: Luca Francesconi and Ivan Fedele. The concert will begin with the master, Donatoni's "Marches," which features the harp and was first performed in 1979.

The performance then moves to the protégés as the symphony offers Francesconi's String Quartet No. 3, "Mirrors," which he presented in 1993. Finally, Fedele's "Imaginary Sky-lines," composed in 1990 and "Accents," created in 2001.

The program offers a sense of perspective and legacy. How does the master teacher influence his charges? The audience will likely find connections, but the experience of this evening allows the listener some sense of context in terms of progression and raises the question of education and influence. The audience will encounter the music as it unfolds, through harp or strings, and in so doing uncover its nuanced origins.

No matter which they hear, audience members will come away with a sense of connection and something to consider, Silva suggests.

"I know of few performance experiences that are as intimate, as thoughtful: live concerts that linger in the mind, quite possibly, for a lifetime."

The rest of the series:

Feb. 6, 2013

Gyorgy Kurtag, "Hommage a R. Sch."

Thomas Larcher, "Fasern"

Thomas Ades, Piano Quintet

March 6, 2013

Messiaen, "Harawi"

May 1, 2013

Ravel, "Chansons madécasses"

Schoenberg, "Pierrot lunaire"