



Pianist is ready for rhapsody

Ted Shaw

Windsor Star

Wednesday, June 18, 2008

Another town, another rhapsody.

Canadian Stewart Goodyear makes his debut tonight at the Detroit Symphony's 8 Days in June festival performing Sergei Rachmaninoff's Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini.

It was just a little more than a month ago, on May 4, that the 30-year-old Goodyear dazzled a Windsor audience with a reading of George Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue.

He's an experienced performer of both works, and has used them as a model for his own Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra. That work was to have been premiered in Windsor, but it is still under construction.

"I'm almost done," Goodyear said. "Without giving too much away, it's a celebration of my cultural heritage, which is half-Trinidadian, half-British."

The Toronto native has been performing in public since the age of 11 and has a history in both Windsor and Detroit stretching back to his early teens. He was just 13 when he made his debut with the DSO in 1991, and 14 the following April when he appeared with the Windsor Symphony, playing the Gershwin rhapsody.

Both works are staples of his repertoire, he said.

"The first performance I heard of the Rachmaninoff was by the composer himself," said Goodyear, and it still ranks as his personal favourite.

"I've done it many times and every time it's a little different. Rachmaninoff embraces a whole universe in the sonorities that he conjures up in the piano part."

The work was inspired by Niccolò Paganini, the 19th-century Italian violin virtuoso. The prevailing theme is Paganini's 24th caprice, although the Dies Irae appears in variations as well.

"Rachmaninoff used the music, of course, but he also utilized the rumour that Paganini sold his soul to the devil," said Goodyear. "There are a lot of elements that are brooding as well as sinister."

While the rhapsody is Goodyear's main assignment, he is also featured in the massive Turangalila Symphony by Olivier Messiaen, which takes up the entire second half of the concert.

"It's like I'm wearing two hats," Goodyear said. "The Rachmaninoff is very lush, very melodic in the traditional sense. With the Messiaen, there's a lot of inspiration from (Richard) Wagner, as well as Paul Dukas and the French school.

"But like Rachmaninoff, Messiaen is such an individual in terms of colour. The work's scored

for a huge orchestra and it has lots of percussion."

It also features solo passages for both piano and the early-20th century electronic instrument, ondes-martenot, which will be performed by French-Canadian Jean Laurendeau.

This will be Goodyear's first performance of the work.

"What is challenging for the piano," he said, "is that Messiaen makes use of birdsong. Not only are you providing colour for the melodic elements, you're also soaring up like a bird."

In addition to his rhapsody, Goodyear has composed several works for solo piano and choral compositions -- he spent his primary school years at Toronto's prestigious St. Michael's Choir School. Recently, the Nathaniel Dett Chorale premiered his adaptation of a poem by early-20th century American civil rights activist James Weldon Johnson.

BOX OFFICE

Pianist Stewart Goodyear performs Sergei Rachmaninoff's Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, tonight at 8 p.m. at Orchestra Hall, 3711 Woodward Ave. Tickets are US\$43.50, available at 313-576-5111 or online at www.detroitssymphony.com.

© The Windsor Star 2008

[CLOSE WINDOW](#)

Copyright © 2008 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.](#) All rights reserved.
CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.](#) All rights reserved.