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Opposite Poles

Las Vegas Philharmonic performing Bartok, Gershwin with guest pianist Joel Fan

By John Przybys

LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Preview

Las Vegas Philharmonic's "Two Twentieth Century Masters: Bartok & Gershwin"

8 p.m. Saturday

Artemus Ham Hall, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 14505 S. Maryland Parkway

\$35-\$75 (895-2787)



Pianist Joel Fan will join the Las Vegas Philharmonic in performing George Gershwin's "Concerto in F" during this weekend's Masterworks series event.

Many music lovers are familiar with George Gershwin through "Rhapsody in Blue" and the composer's popular- and jazz-influenced works.

But, on Saturday, Southern Nevadans can experience a different side of Gershwin during a concert by the Las Vegas Philharmonic.

The Philharmonic's Masterworks series event will feature New York-based pianist Joel Fan accompanying the orchestra in a performance of "Concerto in F," as well as a performance of Bela Bartok's "Concerto for Orchestra."

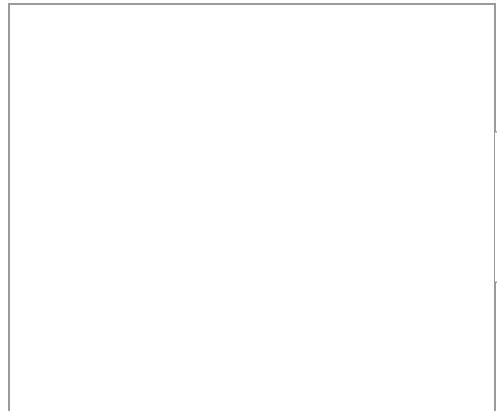
"I think a lot of people who are afraid of 20th-century music ... will be fantastically, pleasantly surprised by their experience," says David Itkin, the Philharmonic's music director and conductor. Bartok's

concerto, which premiered in 1944, is "extremely emotional, very melodic, very dramatic," Itkin says. "It's the last major piece of music he wrote, and he wrote it essentially while he was dying."

Yet, it's far from funereal, he says. Instead, it's a moving exploration "of what the human spirit is about."

The Gershwin piece, meanwhile, premiered in 1925 and was, Itkin notes, the composer's "first attempt at a large orchestral form."

Yet, Itkin says, it's also "very much



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influenced by the same thing that influenced him in all of his work -- Broadway, jazz, popular music styles. That's all very much a part of this concerto."

Bartok and Gershwin are "both 20th-century composers (at) completely opposite poles of the way they approach writing music," Itkin says.

"To hear two great musicians who are writing music very close in time to each other but who have completely different takes on what music sounds like, to me is very exciting," Itkin adds. "It looks at the 20th century in a unique way."

Fan, who will perform the Gershwin piece with the Philharmonic, earlier this year released his second CD, "West of the Sun: Music of the Americas," which charted in the Top 10 on Billboard's classical list.

Fan says he and Itkin met about a year-and-a-half ago. When an invitation to appear as a guest artist with the Philharmonic followed, Fan was pleased, in part because it also allows him to visit his parents, who live here, and because it also complements his recent professional interest in American music.

Fan calls the Gershwin piece he will perform an American masterpiece. "It's a piece that has really so much to offer in terms of, there's virtuosity elements to it and there's lyrical playing as well.

"It's a beautiful piece and very highly spirited as well," he says.

Contact reporter John Przybys at jprzybys@reviewjournal.com or 702-383-0280.

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