

Press Release
Thursday, March 28, 2013

Sidebar...

Doubly Hard

Egyptian Pianist to Tackle Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini...*

When Egyptian pianist Wael Farouk performs Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* with the Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra he will play a piece of music known to be doubly difficult. Music Director, Sarah Ioannides will conduct this concert along with a performance celebrating the 100th Anniversary of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* at the final concert of the season Saturday, May 4.

This 20-minute, 24-variation concerto-like work was composed by the famed Russian Sergei Rachmaninoff, who is known for his extreme keyboard talents. The piece's main musical theme was taken from a work by the 18th century violin virtuoso Niccolò Paganini, who according to legend sold his soul to the devil in exchange for rock-star status and extreme fretboard talents. The end result is a piece of music for piano and orchestra by a man who doubted his own technical abilities to premiere the work in 1934. Rachmaninoff is said to have drunk crème de menthe to steady his nerves before performing. He nicknamed the twenty-fourth and last variation the "Crème de Menthe Variation."

"Wael is a world-class pianist, who will make this music thrilling to anyone," Ioannides said. "There is no doubt in my mind that his performance will be stellar. And what a treat it will be to have someone with a strong Spartanburg connection play a piece of music so well known. When you combine this with our other piece—*The Rite of Spring*—this last concert of the season is guaranteed to get people excited."

At the age of 30, Farouk has already had an extensive performing career. With a vast repertoire spanning from Scarlatti to Bolcom, he commands more than 50 concertos and more than 60 solo programs, including the complete piano works of Chopin and Rachmaninoff. He has appeared as a soloist with the North Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, the Saint-Etienne National Orchestra, the Academy of the Arts Orchestra, the Manhattan Symphony, and the Cairo Symphony Orchestra for more than 20 concertos, including the Egyptian premieres of Rachmaninoff Concerto piano No. 3, Brahms Piano Concerto No. 2, and Prokofiev piano Concertos Nos. 1, 2, and 3.

Since 2001, Farouk has studied on seven full scholarships in the United States at the

Brevard Music Center, the Catholic University of America (on a Fulbright Fellowship) with Marilyn Neeley, Converse College (Masters of Music) with Doug Weeks, and Manhattan School of Music, where he was the recipient of the Elva van Gelder Memorial Scholarship (for receiving the highest audition scores of the 300 pianists who auditioned from all over the world) and from where he graduated in 2007 with a Professional Diploma in the class of Solomon Mikowsky. In 2009, Farouk earned the Artist Diploma Degree from Chicago School of Performing Arts as a student of Dr. Mikowsky, and he is currently working on a DMA at the Rutgers University with Daniel Epstein, where he is the recipient of the prestigious Bunche Award.

Farouk has performed with numerous conductors, including Christoph Mueller, Steven Lloyd, Patrick Fournilier, and Philippe Entremont. He has toured England, Russia, Italy, France, Spain, Hungary, Germany, Czech Republic, Columbia, and Japan, including venues such as the White Hall in St. Petersburg, the Kurt Masur Hall at the Johann Sebastian Bach Music School in Leipzig, and Schumann's house. In 2004, Farouk was given the honor of playing on Tchaikovsky's piano—the first pianist to do so since Vladimir Horowitz.

During the 2012-2013 Season, Farouk played his Carnegie Hall solo debut. Farouk is on the faculty of the Chicago College of the Performing Arts at Roosevelt University.

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