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Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra's season finale will be mix of visual, audial artistry

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The 2014-15 Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra's season has been one of the most exciting since Sarah Ioannides took over as music director and conductor 10 years ago.

From young virtuosos such as Charlie Albright to such masters of their field as Dame Evelyn Glennie, this season has brought several unique and inspiring performances to Spartanburg.

The orchestra's season finale, "Pictures at an Exhibition and Tchaikovsky's Violin," will be at 7 p.m. Saturday at Converse College's Twichell Auditorium.

The concert will be a mix of visual and audial artistry featuring internationally acclaimed solo violinist Vadim Gluzman, who will perform the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto in D while painter Julyan Davis simultaneously paints on stage.

The concert marks the first time the SPO will have mixed live musical performance with live visual arts.

"To my knowledge, the SPO has never had anyone on stage painting during a performance before," said SPO executive director Kathryn Boucher. "I believe it will be an exciting night, and I can't wait to see the final outcome."

Attendees are also encouraged to arrive early for a pre-concert talk given by Converse music professor Siegwart Reichwald from 6:15-6:45 p.m. in the Lawson Academy Recital Hall.

"My background is in the visual arts, so when I realized we would be performing a piece titled 'Pictures at an Exhibition,' I felt the need to bring in the visual arts in some way," Boucher said.

Along with Elizabeth Goddard, the executive director of the Spartanburg Art Museum, Boucher came up with the idea of having an artist painting on stage during the performance

"I felt the artist could draw great inspiration from the musicians and the music," Boucher said. "His paintings are beautiful and they really draw the viewer in for a closer look.



Photo: Marco Borggreve

Acclaimed solo violinist Vadim Gluzman will perform during the Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra's season finale concert.

"I approached Julyan about the project a few months ago and he was very intrigued. He quickly let me know that he has never done anything like this but is very inspired by (Edgar) Degas and (Édouard) Manet — painters with a love of music — and felt it would be a great opportunity."

Davis will be placed in the middle of the musicians and will paint throughout the entire performance. The painting will be raffled off, giving concertgoers the potential opportunity to take home a unique visual memory of the occasion.

During the second half of the concert, while SPO performs "Pictures at an Exhibition," a camera will show a live feed of his canvas on the screen above the orchestra.

While Davis paints, the SPO will feature performances by its special guest, Gluzman.

"I find, every time I hear (Gluzman), he reaches another level and I put him in a handful of the best living violinists of today," Ioannides said. "This will be the fourth concerto we have performed together, and I am thrilled to perform with him again.

"I believe he is one of the greatest living masters of the violin today."

Ioannides chose pieces by Pyotr Illyich Tchaikovsky, Edvard Grieg and Modest Mussorgsky, which she found fit marvelously together, and she built the program to imitate or celebrate life.

"The program builds in grandeur toward the end and it represents, to me, as a whole, the celebration of life," Ioannides said, "from a wedding day to a remarkable violin, violinist and creator (Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto) and finally to art and its connection to music in the 'Pictures at an Exhibition.'"

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