

Arts & Culture SEPTEMBER 29, 2015

Tacoma Symphony kicks off season with Russian energy, pianist Andreas Boyde



BY ROSEMARY PONNEKANTI

Staff writer

After last year's season record-breaking ticket sales, the Tacoma Symphony will kick off its 2015-16 season at the Pantages Theater on Saturday with a crowd-pleasing program of Russian music, featuring pianist Andreas Boyde in Tchaikovsky's rarely played second concerto. The German soloist will also perform Mussorgsky's original piano version of "Pictures at an Exhibition" on Friday (Oct. 2) at the orchestra's fundraising gala at Tacoma Art Museum.

"It's a big, exciting program," said director Sarah Ioannides, who just finished her first season leading the orchestra, which helped spur last year's 20 percent jump in ticket sales and donors. "I heard Andreas play Tchaikovsky's Concerto no. 2 when he was recording it in Freiburg. He has an amazing technique, all muscle. He's a powerhouse. 'Pictures' is played a lot, for good reason, and I know he plays (the piano original), so I concocted the idea of him playing it at Tacoma Art Museum."

Tchaikovsky's second concerto is extremely difficult, and therefore rarely played in the concert world. The first, played by the Tacoma Symphony and Charlie Albright last year and opening with the well-known descending chordal pattern, is far more common; the third is unfinished as an entire concerto. Boyde is one of few pianists to regularly tackle the work; with an international solo career, he has also recorded the entire piano opus of Brahms, and has premiered new works by composers like Paul Schoenfield and John Pickard.

The rest of the Russian-themed program — a popular season-opener for the symphony several years ago — fills out with Prokofiev's "Russian Overture," another lesser-known work that's one of Ioannides' favorites. The Mussorgsky, filled out with typically skillful orchestration by Ravel, is an audience favorite, describing a series of artworks in a museum from peasants with donkey carts to the Russian witch Baba Yaga, and ending with the ringing bells of the gate of Kiev.

For the rest of this season, Ioannides has a wide mixture of the popular and the new. Amid soloists like violinist Caroline Goulding playing the Sibelius concerto, Seattle harpist Valerie Muzzolini Gordon playing the Alvars concerto and guitarist Pepe Romero playing Rodriguez' famous "Concerto de Aranjuez," plus a new Django Reinhardt pops concert, the season also includes a performance of Tan Dun's "Water Passion," a contemporary work inspired equally by J.S. Bach's "St. Matthew Passion" and Peking opera. In it, the musicians (violin, cello, percussion and keyboard), choir and two vocal soloists are gathered around a central cross-shape of 17 water bowls, lit from within.

Ioannides, who worked as Dun's assistant conductor for four years, has conducted the work several times.

"It's incredibly powerful and spiritual," she says. "It crosses borders — that's what Tan Dun's all about."

The season concludes with a performance of Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring," still challenging after 102 years.

For Ioannides herself, the year will be a time of looking to the future: She just announced her resignation from her long-term post at the Spartanburg Philharmonic in South Carolina, taking effect at the end of next season.

"There are a lot of (other) directorship positions opening up," said Ioannides, adding that schooling her three young children in three places — Tacoma, Spartanburg and Connecticut, where the family is based — hasn't been easy. "I'm very happy where we are (at Spartanburg) — it feels like the right time."

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IF YOU GO

What: Tacoma Symphony “Russian” season opening.

When: 7:30 p.m. Saturday.

Where: Pantages Theater, 901 Broadway, Tacoma.

Tickets: \$19-\$79.

And also: Fundraising gala 6 p.m. Friday (Oct. 2) at Tacoma Art Museum, 1701 Pacific Ave., Tacoma; tickets \$175.

Information: 253-591-5894, broadwaycenter.org (concert); 253-272-7264, tacomasymphony.org (gala).



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