

Piano Monster to create tower of tuneful sound Sunday

Bridgette Redman, For the Lansing State Journal 8:04 a.m. EDT May 1, 2015



(Photo: Courtesy photo)

Eight hands. Four grands.

That's what will fill the Fairchild Theatre stage on the Michigan State University Campus this Sunday for the final concert in the showcase series: Piano Monster.

"It's a tower of sound," said College of Music Dean James Forger. "The original idea was to bring something to the Lansing audience that is unique and that plays great music, but also popular music. It has proven to be a hit with the audience because they're works that tend to be short, very tuneful, have great virtuosity and are not something you can hear every day — four Steinway grands on the stage."

The four pianists are Panayis Lyras, Deborah Moriarty, Derek Kealii Polischuk and Zhihua Tang.

All four pianists will play the first half of the concert which includes "Two Slavonic Dances" by Dvorak and the "Carnival of the Animals" by Camille Saint-Saens. The latter includes poetry by Ogden Nash which Forger will narrate.

"We're doing 'Carnival of the Animals' and the Ogden Nash poetry, which brings a delight for kids of all ages," Forger said.

"It's a remarkable use of the piano to paint pictures of the poetry for Ogden Nash and guaranteed to have everyone leave with a smile."

The second half of the concert will be "Petite Suite" by Claude Debussy, "Cuban Overture" by George Gershwin and "Scaramouche" by Darius Mihal. It is in this second half that they'll start to mix up who plays what.

The Debussy will be played by Moriarty and Zhang while the Gershwin will be played by Polischuk and Lyras.

The Debussy will have four hands on one piano while the Gershwin will have two hands on two pianos. Then everyone will join back together for the final number.

"It is unusual to hear even two pianos at the same time, it's quite an undertaking to provide two on the same stage, that's kind of rare," said Lyras.

"Most would have two smaller, baby grands in their teaching studio, but 9-foot concert grands are not easy to come by, so to have four of them, it is quite a happening. That is one of the intrigues of this particular type of concert."

Past Piano Monster concerts were held in the Cobb Great Hall, whereas this year has moved to Fairchild. To accommodate the more intimate space, there are half as many pianos as there has been in the past, but they're still planning to fill the theater with powerful sound.

"If audiences remember they had heard eight pianos the previous time, I don't think they will be disappointed," said Lyras.

"We could probably fit eight on the Fairchild stage, but it would be overkill because it is a small space. Wharton Center was just right for eight pianos at full throttle. It was very enjoyable by the audience."

Because it is in the Fairchild rather than Cobb Great Hall, the College of Music will be offering two concerts instead of one, one at 3 p.m. and the other at 7 p.m.

"It's intended to be an inclusive event," Forger said. "With four Steinway Grands in the intimacy of the Fairchild Theater, it can create quite a roar."

While Lyras generally puts together the music for the program, he said the concert is a collaborative effort between the four pianists.

"We wanted to have music that would be fun for the audience to listen to as well as for us to play, that's the main criteria," said Lyras. "We play so much serious music in our own concerts, this is a chance to have a lot of fun."

The major work in the program is the "Carnival of the Animals," but it is made up of smaller parts. Forger will narrate a poem before each of the smaller pieces.

"It is interactive between the narrator and the pianist," said Lyras. "There are certain issues that come along with that — there needs to be the right timing for the narrator's part and for us to start. We have to follow in. (Forger's) done a terrific job — we've done it before with him."

Both Forger and Lyras emphasized that the concert is meant to be fun and accessible to all.

"Come and enjoy," said Lyras. "Share the fun with us because we have a lot of fun rehearsing. Our rehearsals are so joyous. Enjoy this beautiful music that is fun, dancy (I made up a word) with very, very beautiful music, plus there's a lot of humor."

IF YOU GO

What: Piano Monster Concert

Where: Fairchild Theatre, MSU campus

Who: MSU College of Music

When: 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. Sunday, May 3

Tickets: \$20, \$18 for senior citizens (age 60 and older) and \$10 for students with ID and anyone under age 18. 517-353-5340 or music.msu.edu

Read or Share this story: <http://on.isj.com/1GLrVbE>



The advertisement is a vertical rectangle with a light yellow top half and a dark purple bottom half. In the top half, the Case Credit Union logo is centered, consisting of a stylized 'C' and 'U' above the text 'CASE CREDIT UNION'. A small icon of a computer monitor with a bar chart is in the bottom right of the yellow section. The bottom half contains white text: 'LOCAL UNDERWRITERS WHO SPECIALIZE IN HOME LOANS', a blue button with 'WE OFFER...', and 'CONVENTIONAL FHA & VA YEAR TERM LOANS'.

MORE STORIES

[Joshua Davis finishes 3rd on 'The Voice'](#)
[\(/story/entertainment/2015/05/19/voice-joshua-](#)