

Pompa-Baldi & Friscioni to present “Encore,” a Medici Foundation benefit in Akron on October 18

by Mike Telin



Michael Lynn, Oberlin Conservatory Professor of Recorder and Baroque Flute, founded the Medici Charitable Foundation in 2012 following a liver transplant that restored him to health and allowed him to continue his career as a performing artist and teacher.

The organization presents concerts by distinguished musicians to help raise funds for medical charities and research organizations. “Encore,” Medici’s next concert at Akron Civic Theatre on Saturday, October 18 at 7:30 pm, will benefit Lifebanc, a non-profit organization devoted to organ, eye and tissue recovery in Northeast Ohio. The performers will be the husband and wife piano team of Antonio Pompa-Baldi and Emanuela Friscioni.

Sponsored by Steinway & Sons, the concert will include Franz Schubert’s four-hand *Fantasy in f, op. 103*, selections from Pompa-Baldi’s recent Steinway & Sons CD, *The Rascal and the Sparrow: Poulenc Meets Piaf*, and works by Nikolai Rubenstein and Franz Liszt.



“I’ve known Michael Lynn for some time. One day he approached me and told me about his foundation and that he wanted to organize a concert that would benefit Lifebanc,” Antonio Pompa-Baldi said during a telephone conversation. “Of course I wanted to help and quickly began to think about various possibilities for the program. Then it dawned on me that the best thing would be to play some piano-four-hands repertoire with Emanuela.”

Pompa-Baldi said that he wanted the program to have a popular feel and he believes that all the works on Saturday's program are instantly recognizable and pieces that everyone will enjoy.

"Schubert's four-hand Fantasy is one of the most sublime pieces. Even though there's only one piano, because it's for four hands it's so polyphonically rich. It's just an extraordinary work. Nikoli Rubenstein's *Tarantella* is just a lot of fun. It's a great dance, and again written beautifully for the four hands."

The program's third instantly-recognizable piece for piano four-hands is Franz Bendel's arrangement of Liszt's *Second Hungarian Rhapsody*. "As far as I know, Bendel isn't known for anything other than this arrangement," Pompa-Baldi said, "but it works fabulously."

As Pompa-Baldi told ClevelandClassical in an [interview](#) last November, the Poulenc/Piaf project came to him on Christmas Day of 2012. "I was sitting at my computer sending e-mails and listening to music and I decided to listen to some of the Piaf songs because I have always loved them." Soon he began to realize how much he had always wanted to play Piaf's music but knew it was not part of the standard piano repertoire. "Then I started thinking about the fact that it was the 50th anniversary of Piaf's passing."

He said he realized the only piece of music he knew that had anything to do with Edith Piaf is the improvisation *Hommage a Edith Piaf* by Poulenc. "I played through the score. It is beautiful and almost written in the style of a Piaf song — and that was when the idea started to take shape in my head that maybe I could do something."

That something bloomed into a recording of Piaf songs arranged in Poulenc's style by Pompa-Baldi's long-time friend and composer Robert Piana. "I knew that once I tasked him with the job, he would do wonderfully. He took the songs and in some cases respected the atmosphere and the characteristics of the original songs. In other cases — like the very famous *No, je ne regrette rien* — he turned it into a beautiful lullaby. I think Piana's elaborations work beautifully even though I didn't know what would happen when you lost the incredible power of her voice and her charisma — let alone the words."

Saturday's program also includes some solo works. "I'm playing the Liszt's *Paraphrase on Verdi's Ernani*. So the audience is going to be taken on a journey to heaven with the Schubert Fantasy; to the cabaret with the Poulenc and Piaf songs; to the popular folk dance of the *Tarantella*; to the Hungarian Rhapsody with its themes that were used in cartoons like Tom & Jerry. And we make a brief stop at the opera house as well. The music is going to appeal to everybody so I know they will have a great time. I want many people to turn out because we hope to raise as many funds as possible for Lifebanc and organ donation awareness."

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