

Cleveland International Piano Competition announces its 2017 Concert Series

by Mike Telin



“It’s all about keeping the fun going,” executive director Pierre van der Westhuizen said in a recent telephone conversation about the Cleveland International Piano Competition’s 2017 concert series — one of several piano-centric activities the organization is planning between now and the next competition in 2020.

Now that CIPC is on a four-year cycle, the Concert Series will take place every other year (in 2017 and 2019), with a Young Artists Competition in between (2018).

The 2017 Concert Series will feature the Westhuizen Duo (Pierre and Sofié van der Westhuizen) on February 10 at the Shaker Heights Country Club, Marc-André Hamelin on March 21 in Gartner Auditorium at the Cleveland Museum of Art, and 2016 CIPC Gold Medalist Nikita Mndoyants on April 30 at the Maltz Performing Arts Center.



The Westhuizens’ program, “Viva l’Amore,” will be an early celebration of Valentine’s Day, with four-hand music by popular Romantic composers and Italian-themed food and beverages. “We played this program a couple of years ago for the first time, and many people called and wrote to us saying how much they enjoyed it and hoped we would do it again,” Pierre van der Westhuizen said. “It’s a little different

this time in that it's combined with dinner.”

The Duo will play a similar concert at Steinway Hall in New York to celebrate their entry onto the roster of Steinway Artists. Audiences see that denomination frequently in concert programs, but what does it mean for a pianist? “We don't get a free, 9-foot grand,” Westhuizen said, laughing, “but it's an endorsement from Steinway that we represent excellence as artists. It *does* give us access to Steinway's Artist Services Department, so there's a nice public relations element that helps both the artists and the company.”



Westhuizen describes Marc-André Hamelin as “a wonderful guy, and one of my idols. He's a superstar in the piano world who I've been dying to have come and give a solo recital.” Hamelin, who made a sensational impression in Northeast Ohio in his appearances on the Tuesday Musical series in 2010 and with The Cleveland Orchestra in 2015, will play Chopin (the “Funeral” Sonata), Haydn, Feinberg, Beethoven (the “Appassionata” Sonata), and Scriabin

(*Sonata No. 7*, “White Mass”) at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

“This will be a great opportunity for audiences to hear a pianist who has a monstrous technique,” Westhuizen said. “He became well-known for his recordings of the fiendishly difficult works by Charles-Valentin Alkan — he plays a lot of pieces that nobody else can play. And although his program seems fairly standard, the way he pairs things is always interesting. I think this will be a fascinating recital.”



In our [review](#) of Nikita Mndoyants' semi-final round performance of Prokofiev's *Sonata No. 7* in 2016, we wrote that the pianist “offered up a thrilling roller-coaster ride during his explosive ‘Precipitata.’ Setting a fast tempo which he maintained perfectly, Mndoyants hammered out the work's repetitive triads with true pizzazz, the recurring bass motive driving harder and harder until

everything came to a pyrotechnic ending.”

Audiences can hear Mndoyants in another challenging Prokofiev sonata — No. 8 — on April 30, a piece Westhuizen describes as “a giant work that’s not heard very often.” The Russian laureate has also programmed a late set of Beethoven’s *Bagatelles*, Schumann’s *Davidsbündlertänze*, and Mndoyants’ own *Variations on a Theme by Paganini*.

Westhuizen noted that the Competition has been arranging a lot of concerts and recitals for Mndoyants, “not just in the States, but all over the world.” Those international engagements include concerts in Paris, Brussels, Luxembourg, and Russia. Before playing his April concert at the Maltz Center, the pianist will make local appearances with the Firelands Symphony (February 15) and the Canton Symphony (February 25). “He’ll also be recording a solo album on the Steinway label. These are all through the Competition, which is really wonderful,” Westhuizen said.

Tickets to the three events are already on sale to CIPC Members and will be made available to the general public on the organization’s [website](#) beginning on January 4. Each of the three concerts will be followed by CIPC After Hours events — exclusive meet-the-artist, post-concert parties (separate ticketing required).

Top and bottom photos from the 2016 Severance Hall final round by Roger Mastroianni.

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