

CIPC to present Martha Argerich in Cleveland debut with Sergei Babayan

by Mike Telin

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The Cleveland International Piano Competition (CIPC) announced today that it will present legendary pianist Martha Argerich in her Cleveland debut in a duo piano performance with her friend and colleague Sergei Babayan on Monday, October 30, at 7:30 pm in Severance Hall.

“It’s unbelievable that this is Martha’s first performance in Cleveland,” CIPC president and CEO Pierre van der Westhuizen said during an interview. “And having her play with Sergei, a CIPC winner who has gone on to have his own spectacular career, makes it even more special. This really is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”

The program will include Mozart’s *Sonata for Two Pianos*, K. 448 and the *Larghetto and Allegro for Two Pianos*, as well as Babayan’s two-piano transcriptions of music of Prokofiev. Those include a Suite from *Romeo and Juliet*, Op. 64; selections from the incidental music to *Hamlet*, Op. 77 and *Eugene Onegin*, Op. 71; and film music from *Queen of Spades*, Op. 70. The latter three arrangements will be U.S. premieres.

Widely regarded as one of the greatest pianists of our time, Martha Argerich has garnered an extraordinary list of accolades, culminating in December 2016 with a Kennedy Center Honors recognition of lifetime artistic achievement presented by

President Barack Obama.

Sergei Babayan, the first-place winner at the 1989 Cleveland International Piano Competition (formerly the Robert Casadesus International Piano Competition), is a pianist and teacher of worldwide renown. In addition to his own solo career he has been performing internationally with Argerich for several years.

How did the two pianists first come together? “I’m not sure it was their first meeting, but Sergei and Martha both served on the jury of the Bösendorfer competition in Arizona and they played together at the opening ceremony,” Westhuizen said. “They also played at the Verbier Festival and she invited him to play at her festival in Lugano.”

Westhuizen said that the Argerich/Babayan partnership is one of those rare instances where everything clicked right away. “I know that she’s played two-piano with a lot of different people, but this case both of their temperaments caught fire — it was just chemistry.”

How did CIPC pull off this artistic coup? “Sergei and I were having coffee and I just asked what it would take to bring her here,” Westhuizen recalled. “He started floating the idea to her very carefully and she eventually told him that she would agree in principle to do it. For Martha it’s all about the personal connection — she has a wonderful friendship with Sergei, and he and I have a close relationship as well — so one thing led to another.”

Westhuizen said that he and his CIPC colleagues are still trying to comprehend what all of this means for the Competition and for Cleveland. “It’s the next level of exposure and international recognition. And that is so exciting.”

Tickets are \$30 to \$120 and will be available for purchase beginning on June 1 at clevelandpiano.org.

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