

Sergei Babayan

Armenian pianist to play diverse repertoire at Nicosia's Shoe Factory

Armenian pianist Sergei Babayan will give a recital on Tuesday at The Shoe Factory, Nicosia as part of the Pharos Arts Foundation Concert and Recital series. Internationally acclaimed for the immediacy, sensitivity and depth of his interpretations, his stylistically diverse repertoire will include works by Bach, Rachmaninov, Messiaen and Vladimir Ryabov.

Sergei was a student of legendary teachers and musicians such as Gornostayeva, Naumov, Pletnev and Vlasenko at the Moscow Conservatoire and was one of the first pianists of the former USSR to compete internationally without government sponsorship following the collapse of the country's political system. He has won numerous first prizes including the Cleveland International Piano competition, Palm Beach, Hamamatsu and the Scottish International Piano Competition. This led to major engagements and concert tours received to great critical acclaim.

His recordings too, are highly praised with his recordings of Scarlatti, Ligeti,

Messiaen, Mozart, Mendelssohn and Prokofiev selected a 'critic's choice' in the New York Times. He continually expands on his repertoire "It's terribly important and at the moment, I have fifty-four concerti. I also believe that unusual and imaginative recital programming is important and consider myself an enthusiastic advocate of new music. I'm on a constant search of the new and have studied conducting to help deepen my understanding of the orchestra."

There have naturally been numerous highlights in Babayan's career which recently included a concert at the Mariinsky Theatre, the Prague Spring Festival with the Janacek Chamber Orchestra and a performance of Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto in Belfast broadcast by the BBC.

Babayan's Nicosia recital illustrates his keen understanding of programming. It begins with Vladimir Ryabov's 25 minute Fantasia in c minor Op 21 in memory of Maria Yudina. Peter Laki's

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programme note for Ryabov's piece recounts the stranger than fiction situation of Yudina, "a true intellectual institution in Russia...never afraid to speak up against the communists and...openly affirm her faith, she was a black sheep under the regime."

She miraculously escaped the gulag or worse because she was Stalin's favourite pianist and so he was willing to overlook much! The Fantasy has an unusual structure with five continuous sections with Ryabov making fleeting, subtle illusions to classics by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Mussorgsky and others. A wonderful opportunity to hear the Cyprus premiere of this work.

This will be followed by Messiaen's *Première communion de la Vierge* from

Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus and Bach's *Klavierbuchlein* for Wilhelm Friedemann Bach. Written for Bach's eldest son Wilhelm Friedemann, it is a collection of keyboard music which he began compiling in 1720 with most of the pieces included better known as parts of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* and the *Inventions* and *Sinfonias*.

A perfect end to the recital will surely be the collection of *Preludes and Etude Tableau's* of Rachmaninov, the last great voice of the Russian romantic tradition and a master of melody and aristocratic piano writing. His first piano works were successful with the preludes illustrating Rachmaninov's refined writing and the etudes marking the end of an era, not only for the composer but for Russian music.

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