Music Director Lawrence Eckerling has programmed a truly spectacular start to our new season. During the Sunday October 25 concert the stage of Pick-Staiger Hall will hold two grand pianos on the first half followed by an organ plus single piano on the second half, plus the complete Evanston Symphony Orchestra!

All of our music is by French composers, and opens with Le Tombeau de Couperin by Maurice Ravel (1875-1937). Ravel served in the French army in World War I and lost many friends in the conflict. He memorialized six of them in a solo piano piece whose title (tombeau means tomb) itself evokes the past master of French harpsichord music. In 1920 Ravel selected four of the six portraits for orchestration into the work heard at our concert. Read more about this orchestration on the next page in “Behind the Scenes.”

The Concerto in D Minor for Two Pianos by Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) is possibly the most popular two piano concerto in the repertoire, with that of Mozart as the only other contender. Poulenc was born into a family of great wealth, which allowed him to compose what he desired, and to also enjoy Parisian life in the 1920’s. The first and third movements of Poulenc’s concerto are filled with the spirit of French folk tunes and music hall ditties. However, the inspiration for the beautiful second movement is clearly Mozart, in particular his Piano Concerto No. 20, also in the key of D Minor.

Charles Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) was, like Mozart, a great child prodigy, beginning composing at age four and playing a piano recital at age five. He was a friend of Hector Berlioz and Franz Liszt, but was also the first important composer to write a movie score. Saint-Saëns’ Third Symphony (“with organ”) dates from 1886 and was dedicated to Franz Liszt, whose technique of taking a theme and transforming it into many different forms is used throughout the “Organ” Symphony. Another great influence is that of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony with its progression from darkness to light and its movement from the key of C minor in the first and third movements to C major in the finale. Saint-Saëns underscores his C major with the powerful entry of the solo organ. This symphony is Saint-Saëns’ most enduring legacy and will provide an spectacular ending to our opening concert!

—David Ellis

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THE EVANSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA IS AN ILLINOIS NOT-FOR-PROFIT COMMUNITY ORCHESTRA PROVIDING DIVERSE, ENJOYABLE AND ACCESSIBLE MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENT THAT ENRICHES THE ORCHESTRA, THE AUDIENCE AND THE COMMUNITY.
The first concert of the ESO’s 2009/10 season is entitled “Keyboard Extravaganza,” and it certainly lives up to its name. Not only do piano or organ play an important role in each of the works on this concert, but they also present differing difficulties, both obvious and less obvious to the average concertgoer.

The tour of our concerts begins with the French composer and contains the sensibilities of the baroque keyboard suites from the period that the organist doesn’t use keyboard at all, but is an orchestration of four movements from Ravel’s original six movement piano suite of the same name. And this presents a significant complication. As a conductor, one cannot (and should not) try to play this work as simply an orchestrated version of the piano piece. For one thing, orchestral instruments have different characteristics than a piano, and from each other. If one tries to play the first movement of the orchestra suite at the same tempo as one would play it on the piano, what would sound clean, clear and virtuosic on the piano would sound like an utter mess in the orchestra.

The final work on the program, Saint Saën’s Organ Symphony, of course contains an organ. But before we talk about the organ, the orchestra also requires two pianos! But this time, it is two pianists AT THE SAME PIANO — called, “one piano, four hands.” There are unique problems associated with this style. First, as a pianist I can tell you that it is extremely uncomfortable to play next to someone. You are completely cramped. And while you certainly can see each other’s arms and hands, the second pianist has no pedal for both parts.

The Organ Symphony does indeed use an organ. Our performance will use a portable organ donated by Steinway of Chicago which will come close to duplicating the sound of a true pipe organ, but installing the speakers and the cables on the stage is the way the piano must be physically set. The two pianists face each other, but they cannot see each other’s hands and arms. In fact, they can only see the faces of each other. (And even that glimpse can be obstructed if either of the pianists is performing with printed music.) Furthermore, when notes are struck on a piano (in a percussive-like way), it is extremely difficult to play exactly together.

The Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra is obvious in its use of two pianos (and two pianists). The complication in any work for two pianos with orchestra is the way the pianos must be physically set on stage. The two pianists face each other, but they cannot see each other’s hands and arms. In fact, they can only see the faces of each other. (And even that glance can be obstructed if either of the pianists is performing with printed music.) Furthermore, when notes are struck on a piano (in a percussive-like way), it is extremely difficult to play exactly together!
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CONCERT ONE
OCTOBER 25, 2009
FRENCH KEYBOARD EXTRAVAGANZA
Laurence Elkind, Conductor
Ravel Le Tombeau de Couperin
Poulenc Concerto in D Minor for Two Pianos And Orchestra
Irina Kavtarishvili and Gregory Shifrin, Pianos
Saint-Saëns Symphony No. 3 in C Minor
with Organ, Op. 78
Jeannie Richardson, Organ

CONCERT TWO
FEBRUARY 9, 2010
TRUMPET SPECTACULAR
Lawrence Elkind, Conductor
Altenburg Concerto for 7 Trumpets and Timpani
Vaughan Williams Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis
Haydn Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra, in E Flat Major
Don Cagen, Trumpet
Dvořák Scherzo Capriccioso, Op. 66
Janáček Sinfonietta

CONCERT THREE
MARCH 21, 2010
THE ROMANTIC CELLO
Lawrence Elkind, Conductor
Weber Overture to Oberon
Beethoven Symphony No. 8 in F Major, Op. 93
Dvořák Cello Concerto in B Minor, Op. 104
Wendy Warner, Cello

CONCERT FOUR
MAY 2, 2010
RUSSIAN FOLKFEST
Lawrence Elkind, Conductor
Liadov Eight Russian Folk Songs, Op. 58
Tchaikovsky Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D Major, Op. 35
Irina Muresanu, Violin
Stravinsky Petrushka (1947) Complete Ballet

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