

Pianist Fan to help GBS mark milestone season on Saturday

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Fireworks are essential to any major celebration.

That's the thinking at the Greater Bridgeport Symphony. And to prove the point, the orchestra will continue its diamond anniversary celebration on Saturday with the pyrotechnics of Joel Fan — a virtuoso pianist that *The Washington Post* describes as "versatile and sensitive," *The Boston Globe* calls "superb" and *The Village Voice* deems "extraordinary."

GBS Music Director Gustav Meier will conduct.

The second concert in the GBS' 2005-06 season "will showcase big, late romantic masterworks . . . some of the most appealing and powerful works that the orchestra has presented during its 60-year history," says GBS Executive Director Jena Maric. "It's great music that's also beloved by audiences."

Fan — who began his remarkable career with the New York

Philharmonic under conductor Zubin Mehta and has since appeared in recital and with orchestras throughout the United States, Asia and Europe — will be featured on one of the most popular piano works ever written: Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 2.

The "Best of 60 Years" concert — sponsored in part by the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism — also will feature Brahms' "Academic Festival" Overture and Beethoven's "Coriolan" Overture. Also a highlight will be Respighi's symphonic poem "The Pines of Rome," requiring the largest orchestra of the season. (Because of the demands of the piece, the orchestra will swell from 65 to 85 musicians.)

Fan, a native New Yorker, comes to Bridgeport through his friendship with Maestro Meier.

The two met in August 2003 at the International Conducting Workshop & Festival in Sofia, Bulgaria, where the globe-trotting Fan was performing with the New Symphony Orchestra and Meier was leading the conducting workshops.

"Phenomenal," says Meier of Fan's performance. "I heard him perform the Brahms Piano Concerto No. 2, a very challenging piece. He had total control and performed with such ease. He is a rare find."

Says Fan: "When I heard that [Meier] was going to be in the audience" at that performance, "I was very excited. He is a legendary conductor, and a legendary conducting pedagogue."

When Meier extended an invitation to perform in Bridgeport, Fan jumped at the opportunity.

"I'm thrilled to be working with him . . . the honor is all mine."

Fan says the Rachmaninoff is one of his favorites.

"It is such a passionate piece, with overwhelming emotion . . . with sadness, tragedy and triumph.

"For me it is a great piece that is well crafted. I not only love it, I admire the way it was constructed."

In addition to a crammed year-round schedule as a solo artist, Fan frequently collaborates with superstar cellist Yo-Yo Ma. Next spring, Fan, Ma and violinist Jonathan Gandelsman will perform Beethoven's Triple Concerto with the New York Philharmonic,

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with David Zinman conducting, at Lincoln Center.

Fan also is a performing member of the Silk Road Project, founded in 1998 by Ma to illuminate the cultural legacy spawned along the ancient trade routes that connected East Asia to the Mediterranean. The cellist and his collaborators perform music from that vast region — using a host of indigenous instruments — in concerts throughout the world.

Fan's fascination with the piano began at about age 5 when he took to banging on his parents' "little upright." (The piano has a place of honor in Fan's Manhattan apartment, along with his grand piano. "When my parents [recently] moved to Las Vegas, I just couldn't let them get rid of that old piano . . . so I inherited it," he says, laughing.)

It wasn't long before the Fans realized their son was gifted, and special training was begun. "As a kid, I was good at the piano, so I kept doing it because it felt good. And I loved being in front of an audience," he says, laughing.

He would go on to receive a bachelor of arts degree from Harvard University in computer science and a master of music degree in piano performance from the Johns Hopkins University's Peabody Conservatory — as a student of the legendary Leon Fleisher — in Baltimore.

Fan continues to love being on stage. "It is the greatest high to be so in the moment . . . the act of performing is amazing . . . to literally create something that is new and fresh and that at any moment can go off in a thousand different directions.

"And if things go well, there is an electricity in the hall that is quite exciting."

During the few weeks a year that Fan is not touring, he devotes his time to the project dearest to his heart: the Joel Fan Foundation (www.joel.fan.org).

"It's wonderful to be able to give back. What are we here for if not to help one another?"

Joel Fan,
pianist

to financially support and encourage young and developing artists.

"The arts are tough enough . . . you can never have enough friends in the arts. We help struggling young artists to connect" with prospective patrons.

"It's wonderful to be able to give back. What are we here for if not to help one another?"

■ WHEN YOU GO

The Greater Bridgeport Symphony's "The Best of 60 Years" will take place Saturday at 8 p.m. at The Klein, 910 Fairfield Ave. in Bridgeport. Free parking is available in the lot across the street from the municipal auditorium.

The GBS Percussion Ensemble will be featured at the 7 p.m. pre-concert program in the Klein's inner lobby.

Tickets, which range from \$18 to \$50, are available Monday through Friday by contacting the GBS offices at 576-0263. Discounts are available for students under age 21 and for groups of 10 or more.

The Klein box office will be open Saturday only, beginning at 1 p.m. for telephone reservations (576-8115) and 5 p.m. for walk-up sales.

The concert will be preceded by a GBS benefit fashion show at The Klein from 5 to 7 p.m. Admission, which is \$50, includes hors d'oeuvres and cocktails. (The event is open only to those holding tickets for the 8 p.m. concert.)

Additional information on the season is available at www.bridgeportsymphony.org. (Program notes will be posted on the orchestra's Web site a few days prior to Saturday's concert.)

For additional information on cellist Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road