

[Dranoff closes season with exciting program for pianos and percussion](#)

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By Lawrence Budmen



Pianists Maarten van Veen (left) and Ralph van Raat performed a program for pianos and percussion Saturday night at South Miami-Dade Cultural Arts Center.

The Dranoff Foundation concert series has presented consistently imaginative programming, expanding the two-piano repertoire beyond the familiar scores of Mozart and Rachmaninoff.

“Bang the Ivories,” Dranoff’s final program of the season, proved the most innovative offering yet. In the clear, bright acoustics of the South Miami Dade Cultural Arts Center in Cutler Bay, the concert blended two pianos with marimba and percussion in music from the late 20th and early 21st century as well as a too-rarely-performed classic.

Unlike some previous concerts, the program did not lean toward populist transcriptions, with the addition of a large percussion battery bringing some edgy and engaging works. Pianist Maarten van Veen (a 1995 Dranoff Competition winner) teamed with contemporary music specialist, pianist Ralph van Raat and renowned Scottish percussionist Colin Currie joined Benjamin Ramirez, principal timpanist of the Columbus Symphony.

Alexandre Rabinovitch-Barakovsky is best known as a duo piano partner of Martha Argerich but he is also a composer and conductor. His *Liebliches Lied*, written in 1980, opens with a romantic theme that gradually becomes less conventional, the repeated chords and scales in the second piano part seasoned with a touch of minimalism. The score effectively displayed van Veen and van Raat’s elegant touch and sustained teamwork.

Trophic Cascades by Dave Maric is based on the British composer's interest in biodiversity and ecosystems but the work is best appreciated for the enticing sound world that mixes high avant garde classicism with populist vernacular music. Mallet percussion solos suggest the sounds of the Javanese gamelan and the Dies Irae motif as well as strands of bebop and boogie-woogie make appearances.

Currie was a ball of fire moving between mallet percussion and thwacking drums and cymbals with Ramirez a steady, driving presence at the timpani. At times Currie took over as conductor, leading his colleagues through rhythmically complex sections. Skillfully conceived, Maric's score is not terribly profound but it is tremendously entertaining, especially when played with such vibrancy and enthusiasm.

Realismos Mágicos for solo marimba by Norwegian composer Rolf Wallin is dedicated to Currie. Based on the poetic titles of short stories by Gabriel García Marquez, the eleven movement work displays the full panoply of the instrument's melodic, percussive and mood setting capabilities. Some of the movements last only a few seconds, twice provoking laughter from the audience.

The score opened with an echo of impressionism that turned dark and lugubrious. Jazzy and aggressive sections were followed by melodic fragments and moments of poetic lyricism. A hard driving, angry finale proved a tour de force for Currie's dexterity and instrumental mastery.

Dranoff artistic advisor Erik Ochsner described his arrangement of British composer Gavin Bryars' Sketch for Sub-Rosa as "sorbet to cleanse the palette before the main course," and the transcription nicely encompassed the score's gentle minimalist impulse. Placing the marimba's melodic strains on top of the two piano's repetitive motto was particularly ingenious.

Bartok's Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion was written in 1937 as darkness was descending across Europe. The central Lento is an almost tragic duet for two pianos with one player sliding his hands across the keyboard, producing a glassy underscoring. From the first cymbal smash, the outer movements are fierce and unrelenting.

Van Veen and van Raat set a seemingly impossibly fast tempo for the first movement but their technical command was so impressive that not a note was blurred or fudged. Currie's snare drum was an ominous force behind the fugal passages. The four players held nothing back in a full-throttle reading of the Hungarian rondo finale, the quiet ending for snare drum and cymbal one of many surprising touches in this unique score.