

Miami's unique music scene booming

BY ERIK OCHSNER

DRANOFF2PIANO.ORG

South Florida and the performing arts — who knew just how amazing? Art Basel has helped draw the world's attention to Miami's dynamic graphic arts scene. Less noticed is the role of the performing arts, in particular music, in Miami's cultural life.

I live in New York City, but I conduct orchestras all over the world — from Finland to New Zealand to France to China, to name a few. What has been bringing me to Miami for the past two years is my position as artistic director of the Dranoff 2 Piano Foundation, a homegrown Miami institution with global reach.

As an outsider looking in, I have been impressed and inspired by the vibrant, thriving art scene that I have encountered in Miami. Again and again, I have been struck by the rich diversity I encounter, not only in terms of the many cultures that criss-cross and come together in exciting ways, but also by the wealth of opportunities to immerse oneself in music and art.

Miami has introduced me to the Seraphic Fire vocal ensemble, SoBe Arts, the Miami Light Project, the Florida Grand Opera and, of course, the New World Symphony. The variety of programming that the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts offers, including the world-class Cleveland Orchestra, is remarkable. I was blown away by ArtWalk in Wynwood and the Perez Art Museum Miami, and am looking forward to experiencing Art Basel, the Ultra Music Festival and some of the film festivals featured in Miami venues throughout the year.

It didn't take me long to recognize that Miami, with its own unique flavor, has something special to offer — exposure to new experiences, be it meeting and working with people from diverse backgrounds and cultures, trying a new cuisine, watching a foreign movie, or experiencing different kinds of music. It continually reminds me just how thrilling and enriching it can be to discover something new. It's good from time to time to challenge one's comfort zone.



ERIK OCHSNER

In the classical music world we sometimes find a certain reluctance to listen to new pieces. One of the features of my work with the Dranoff 2 Piano Foundation that I appreciate most is precisely its celebration of the new, along with the tried and true. Not only does the Dranoff welcome new pieces in our programming, we regularly commission original works of music for two pianos. Examples include works by John Corigliano, William Bolcom and Gabriela Lena Frank; recently, we began commissioning a series of jazz pieces for two pianos.

Working with composers and introducing audiences to new music is a wonderful way to ensure that music doesn't become a static art form, rooted only in the past.

Few programs give performers and audiences alike exposure to the creative process and new art forms than Dranoff's Piano Slam. Piano Slam is a performance program that uses music as a vehicle to enhance learning and as an inspiration to give young people a voice through artistic expression.

It is a poetry-writing competition that asks students to compose works of poetry inspired by their reactions to a selection of music, and, if they become a finalist, to perform their composition at our Piano Slam event at the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts.

The next Piano Slam finale will be held at the Arsht Center on April 30, and if you haven't been to one yet, don't miss this year's. You will be amazed and moved.

Coming up even sooner — Saturday, March 28 — is Dranoff's *Bang the Ivories* concert at the South Miami-Dade Cultural Arts Center. It is a perfect example of what the Dranoff does best: bring world-class pianists together to energize, inspire and delight.

For this performance, the pianists will be joined by two widely respected percussionists to play music both familiar and new. The program includes compositions by one of the most famous composers of classical music — the Hungarian Béla Bartók — and new music by British composer Dave Maric.

Miami is unique; Dranoff is uniquely Miami. How fortunate I am to have discovered both.

ERIK OCHSNER IS A FREELANCE ORCHESTRA CONDUCTOR, MUSIC DIRECTOR FOR THE SONOS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE DRANOFF INTERNATIONAL 2 PIANO FOUNDATION.