

NEWS

Exclusive Interview. Canadian prominent pianist Ronee Boyce will perform in Armenia

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She gave an exclusive interview to Hakob Asatryan, the editor of ORER Armenian European magazine



-You are planning on playing in Armenia this November. How did you come to the decision of including Yerevan in your European tour?

I have always felt a very strong connection to the music of Eastern Europe and Eurasia in general. Armenia is a culturally decadent country that has long been on my bucket list of places to experience and embrace. As such, I consider it a very special opportunity not only to visit this particular region of the world, but also to have the incredible privilege of sharing music with people as I travel.

Before visiting Armenia, how familiar were you with the Armenian culture or music?

Apart from cultural insights which close Armenian friends have afforded me and encounters with various Armenian music compositions, my familiarity is not that extensive, but these preliminary factors have had a very strong hand in my desire and decision to visit Armenia. I really hope that this entire experience will draw me closer to Armenian culture and provide clearer insight into its musical heritage and day to day lifestyle.

This is your first concert in Armenia. What expectations do you have, and with what programme will you be performing? Where, and with whom?

I will be performing a solo piano recital called Calm and Civil Unrest; it is a program with which I have toured Western Canada this year. The program will feature piano works of Beethoven, Chopin, Ravel and Albeniz among other composers. While in Armenia I will perform at the Cafesjian Center for the Arts in Yerevan, the Khatchaturian Museum Concert Hall and also in the city of Bangladesh. Above all, my principal hope is that the Armenian public will be interested enough to attend one of my November concerts and to allow me the unique honor of sharing music with them during my visit.

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Have you ever played any works of Czech or Armenian composers?

Absolutely! In fact, I have programmed a fantastic piano sonata on my recital by the great Czech composer, Leos Janáček. It is a profoundly intense and tragic composition with an even more intriguing storyline. I have also played chamber works by Smetana, Dvořák and Martinu. As for Armenian music composers, I will perform a few piano works by Aram Khachaturian in one of my upcoming concerts. Within the past year I was introduced by a colleague to the marvellous works of Arno Babajanyan; I am so grateful to learn about the existence of this wonderful Armenian composer and plan to explore more of his compositions in the near future. Arno Babajanyan wrote an interesting composition for piano called Vaghharshapat, named after the Armenian city; I plan to visit there during my stay for greater insights into his musical inspirations!

While in Europe, upon hearing your interpretations of a solo repertoire by Sergei Prokofiev, the great Russian pianist Lazar Berman said that, "somewhere, very deep inside you, you are Russian." Has Prokofiev been the reason why you have begun learning Russian?

I had the privilege of playing for the great 20th century Russian concert pianist Lazar Berman in 2004, just a few months before his passing. He was kind enough to encourage me to read Sergei Prokofiev's diary written in 1928, which Prokofiev's son Svjatoslav translated into English. Although Prokofiev's diary contains many words that are not directly translatable from Russian, I was incredibly fascinated by the effective ideas behind the meanings of certain Russian words. The resulting derived word translations gave way to outstanding "word pictures" that the English language simply does not have the power of creating on its own. As such, I developed a greater desire to learn Russian in order to connect more closely with its music and culture. I have been learning Russian for the past two years now, and hope to put it to the test in conversation with Armenia's vast Russian-speaking population!

What place does music have in your life and besides playing the piano, do you yourself like to compose?

Music, like water or air, occupies a very natural yet completely vital place in my everyday life. It has always been either audibly present around me, or somewhat more passively alive within the recesses of my thoughts. It can be said to a certain extent that every single sonority in life is a form of music. As for music composition, I certainly have a high degree of appreciation for this realm and only wish I possessed an advanced skillset for it. As such, I have generally applied the compositional skills I do possess toward creating chamber music arrangements.

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The few works I have been successful in composing were mostly inspired by particular events during my travels to various locales such as Spain, France and Israel; a more recent composition was a reproduction of a dream I once had. Who knows, perhaps my Armenian expedition will become the inspiration for a future composition!

You speak fluent English, French and Spanish, which for a Canadian is natural. What has been the particular reason for you to start learning Italian, Romanian and even Czech?

I absolutely love all languages; my goal is to learn 10 languages in my lifetime, and to be able to communicate with as many people as possible. Although Italian, Romanian and Czech were among the languages that I eventually wanted to learn, my initial reasons for starting were mostly circumstantial.

The Spanish and Italian languages are very similar; after spending ample time surrounded by native Italian speakers while in Europe I found myself understanding more and more of it almost as if by osmosis. Eventually I found myself reading as much of the daily Corriere Della Sera Italian newspaper as I could comprehend. The desire to learn Romanian was initially sparked by a Romanian university music professor I'd studied with, along with a deep appreciation for the language's warm tone; I began learning Czech after an encounter with a family of 8 who arrived as refugees in Canada without knowledge of English. I believe the great challenges of the Czech language gave way to more rewarding English translations and interestingly enough, I now have a deepened understanding of my own English mother tongue. Surmounting some of the incredible hurdles of the Czech language indirectly helped prepare me for my current Russian studies. Exposure to the languages which I either speak fluently or of which I possess a working knowledge have helped me gain a better understanding of the world around me and have endowed me with a greater degree of compassion.

You were born in Canada. You started playing the piano at 4 years old. What influenced or motivated you to begin that early?

When I was 3 years old, my parents and I were exiting a store in a Toronto shopping center when we suddenly heard the sound of live piano music coming from the mall's main area. After following the trail of sound, I finally was able to see a man playing the piano in front of a large crowd of people. I was greatly impacted by the striking beauty of the grand piano, its mellifluous sound, and the grand manner in which the musician played; I knew instantly that it was a pianist I wanted to become. From that day forward, I begged my parents for a piano of my own. A few months later, my Dad surprised me with a small keyboard, and I began trying to teach myself to play songs right away. My parents decided to send me for piano lessons shortly afterwards.

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What other work do you do?

I am the Artistic Director of a Toronto-based classical concert series called Neapolitan Connection. We are an innovative classical music society with the principal aim of contributing substantially to enriching the cultural life in the city of Toronto and beyond. In the 6 years of its existence, Neapolitan Connection has already presented over 80 classical concerts, featured over 100 local and international performing artists and had its high-profile soloists and chamber musicians featured on Classical 96.3fm Radio. This society also strives to give back to the community by way of Minds On Music, an outreach program which places classical music within the reach of those unable to access it. This program helped raise adequate funding to initiate classical music instruction for youths in the El Sistema Bahamas Program. On a personal note, this artistic role has allowed my own sense of creativity to burgeon, materialize and soar in diverse ways previously unfathomable. It has been a most fulfilling undertaking.

What do you consider to be your main goal in life and what makes you the most happy?

I think the main goal in life is to be happy, and to do things that also bring others the most happiness. Each person's definition of happiness is different. I know that making music definitely brings me happiness as does sharing it, which also seems to bring other people happiness in turn. This reciprocal exchange of happiness using music as the main channel is an area of my life I will gladly do my small part in the world to employ especially when it comes to musical education of younger minds, so that the legacy of classical music will continue its longstanding reign and carry forward to future generations.

