

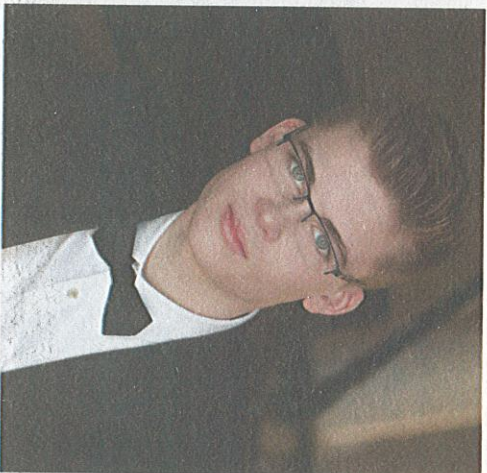
Sock of the new

Young soloist, new music spice up Lansing Symphony

By LAWRENCE COSENTINO

A young piano soloist and a baby-fresh piece of music (by classical standards, at least) promise to liven up Saturday's Lansing Symphony slate. But Maestro Timothy Muffitt is not rolling the dice. Neither are unproven quantities.

In fall 2012, Muffitt brought Colton Peltier (pronounced "pell-tee-air") in to solo with the Baton Rouge Symphony, which



Courtesy photo

Colton Peltier, 20, is the guest pianist at LSO's MasterWorks 2 concert.

Lansing Symphony Orchestra
Masterworks 2: Chopin & Mendelssohn featuring Colton Peltier, piano
8 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 11
\$50-\$14
Warnton Center, Cobb

Great Hall
750 E. Shaw Lane, MSU campus, East Lansing
(800) WHARTON,
whartoncenter.com

Muffitt also leads. Audience feedback was so positive that Peltier came back a year later to open the 2013-'14 season.

"It's hard to describe his personality," Muffitt said. "There's a certain unassuming confidence he brings. He's an exciting performer."

He's also an elusive one. Saturday afternoon, he got carried away practicing virtuosic Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1, which he's performing for the first time Saturday. He called me back, 20 minutes late, to explain that his phone was turned off and he lost track of time.

Peltier's dormitory at the Julliard School, near 65th Street and Broadway, is only two blocks from Central Park, where he likes to run, and a quick stroll across a pedestrian bridge from the nearest Starbucks.

Peltier feels that his youth is an advantage, at least where Chopin is concerned.

"It fits me well because Chopin wrote the piece when he was 19 years old and performed it when he was 20," Peltier explained. "I can relate to it." Peltier turned 20 in July.

"It's a little bit sentimental," he said. "There's a lot of fire. There are peaceful moments. It covers a lot of emotional ground."

He jokingly called himself "the black

sheep" of a family of jocks. His father, Dan Peltier, played baseball for the Texas Rangers and San Francisco Giants. His mother, Amy, was a swimmer.

When he was 3, Peltier got up and danced around during a Kindermusik program. The miffed teacher told his mother not to put him into piano lessons, but she did anyway.

Peltier burrowed into the piano like a clam into wet sand. At 9, he made his performing debut, playing Beethoven's First Concerto with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra.

"It was a great experience," he said. "It was nerve-wracking as a 9-year-old, but everyone in the orchestra was so nice and welcoming."

From there, gigs and competitions mounted — scan the program notes for the numbing litany — leading up to two Baton Rouge performances with Muffitt and this week's Lasing gig. Suffice it to say his childhood wasn't like that of most people.

"I've been deprived of some things, but I've gotten to do things many people don't experience," he said.

Besides the Chopin, Saturday's opener features a relatively new work that has caught on big in 21st century concert halls, the unabashedly melodic "Musica Celestis" ("Music of the Heavens") by Aaron Jay Kernis.

Murrith called Kernis "one of the most important living American composers, a significant voice."

The piece promises a two-pronged thrill for Muffitt. For one thing, he's never conducted it before. More to the point, he and the LSO scored big with a new piece by Christopher Theofanidis, "Rainbow Body," last year, sparking an instant ovation. Muffitt longs for a repeat.

"It was so great to create that kind of a powerful interface with an audience with a piece of music from a living American composer," he said.

Kernis, a New Yorker, can be pretty prickly, but in "Musica Celestis," he sides with the angels, drawing his inspiration from a medieval well of religious ecstasy.

Muffitt pointed out that "Musica Celestis" has a lot in common with Samuel Barber's famous "Adagio for Strings." Like the "Ada-

gio," it's the bittersweet slow movement of a string quartet, pumped up to a gut-wrenching orchestral throb. And, like the "Adagio," it takes a feather to your spine and an onion to your tear ducts before you can get your guard up.

"People hear it and have the same reaction: What is this music? This is the most beautiful music I've ever heard," Muffitt declared. "It's become viral. Audiences immediately respond to it in a positive way."

Saturday's closer, Mendelssohn's Fourth Symphony, is designed to stroke the blushing early romanticism of Chopin into a pleasant chest rash that stops just short of scandal.

"The Mendelssohn is just so joyous and exuberant," Muffitt said. "It's a nice way to bring the night to a close."