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American brings Russians to Sault Ste. Marie

Pianist celebrates romantic composers Saturday

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Pianist Michael Coonrod plays the role of musical ambassador when he performs in Sault Ste. Marie Saturday.

His program, Russian Romantics, includes three works by Nikolai Medtner, a 20th century composer who doesn't share the same public recognition enjoyed by contemporaries such as Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky and Igor Stravinsky.

"It's taken 50 years for his music to be appreciated," said Coonrod in a telephone interview Monday.

"It's getting more well-known the more that we play it. It's very lush, romantic. Textures are thick, but kind of folk melodies as well."

The Interlochen Center of the Arts faculty member is featured in a special fundraising concert for Chamber Singers of Algoma at 4 p.m. at St. Luke's Cathedral.

Besides Medtner's Danza festiva Op. 38 No.3, Danza silvestra, Op. 38 No. 7 and a movement from Sonata tragica in C Minor, Op. 39 No. 5, Coonrod will also perform works by Rachmaninov, Tchaikovsky, Sergei Prokofiev, Mikhail Glinka and Alexander Scriabin.

"The music of Russia grips us with its passion, energy, depth of sound and unabashed strength," Coonrod writes in his program notes.

"Whether for orchestra, chamber ensemble, or for piano, it has a distinct national character."

His recordings include Reflections on Schubert and 50th Anniversary Favourites. The 2006 release marks a half-century of piano performance that started when he was about four years old.

"I just love the sound of the piano, the richness of the harmonies," said Coonrod.

"Much of it is founded in the harmonies. I like to think of myself as painting pictures with the sound and how you play one note louder than the other. You fuse that with the phrasing that the composers give you to play with. I'm sure that's exactly what attracts me to it."

Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for students.

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