

## A Date With Destiny

Pianist reconnects with Steinway of his choosing

by Becca Martin-Brown | January 20, 2019 | Springdale, AR



*Photo: Christian Steiner*

*Pianist Andrew Tyson made his orchestral debut at the age of 15 with the Guilford Symphony as winner of the Eastern Music Festival Competition.*

It's not exactly a blind date. Andrew Tyson has met this particular temptress before, but their relationship was brief. Now, when he returns to Fayetteville on Jan. 26, the long wait will be over. Tyson will get to play Frederic Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 2 on the Steinway he selected for the Walton Arts Center.

"I'm actually a little nervous about that," he says, laughing. "If I don't like the piano or I don't play it well, it's all on me."

One of the hottest young names in piano performance and winner of the 2011 Young Concert Artists International Auditions, the Terence Judd-Hallé Orchestra Prize at the 2012 Leeds International Piano Competition, the Gina Bachauer Piano Competition and the Arthur Rubinstein Prize in Piano, Tyson was last in Northwest Arkansas in 2013, when he played with the Artosphere Festival Orchestra -- and "had a wonderful time," he says.

Shortly thereafter, the Walton Arts Center was in the process of acquiring a new piano, thanks to the generosity of Sara Sharp and the Community Concerts Association, and Tyson went with SoNA music

director Paul Haas and Walton Arts Center President/CEO Peter Lane to the Steinway factory in Queens, N.Y., to help make the selection. He says he played five pianos, considering not only his preferences -- "I prefer a more intimate, softer, quieter, more expressive instrument" -- but also how that piano needed to project over an orchestra and to the back of a 1,201-seat performance hall.

Although he'll just now be playing the Steinway D concert grand with the Symphony of Northwest Arkansas - - on a piece Haas calls "achingly beautiful" and "one of Chopin's most famous love poems" -- Tyson is no stranger to a Steinway: There's a 30-year-old baby grand in his Philadelphia home. Still, his path to success sounds very much like every other pianist's, he says, laughing again. His older sister took piano lessons, and initially, he wanted to do what she did. Then he fell in love with the instrument on its own merit.

"It wasn't something I did all the time until I was in conservatory, though," the 32-year-old from Durham, N.C., says. "I had a pretty normal childhood. In fact, I would say I continue to develop my love for it. It's a process."

Tyson says preparing to play any piece of music is also a process -- a "laborious" one -- requiring him to consider both the physical and analytical aspects but most importantly, "the spirit of the music."

"You can plan all of that, to a certain extent, but in the moment of performance, music is so fragile, so ephemeral. So on stage, I do try to forget all that preparation as much as possible and leave room for the inspiration of the moment -- which can be affected by the time in my life or the hall that day, the piano and its individual qualities, the orchestra, the conductor. I try to make each performance different and embrace the fragility, not perfectly replicate what I've practiced."

For Tyson, SoNA is just one stop in a hectic schedule that includes performances across the United States and in Tokyo, Shanghai, Istanbul, Perth, Sydney, London and Vancouver, to name a few.

"There are difficulties unique to traveling, to the sort of transient nature of this life," he says, "but I hate to complain, because it is a privilege beyond words to be able to do this. I am endlessly grateful for it."

## FAQ

SoNA Masterworks II

With Andrew Tyson

WHEN — 7:30 p.m. Jan. 26

WHERE — Walton Arts Center in Fayetteville

COST — \$32-\$55

INFO — 443-5600

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