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By NIKKI PATRICK

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PIANOS AND ANIMALS

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A program of four selections by French composers will be presented under the direction of Dr. Selim Giray, who will be making his debut as symphony conductor.

An associate professor of violin, viola and chamber music, he also serves as concertmaster and assistant conductor of the Ohio Light Opera, and has performed frequently on national public radio and television.

He said that he is excited and pleased with the concert planned for Sunday, which will feature several guest artists with the symphony. One of them, pianist Gulimina Mahamuti, will be teamed with her former professor, Dr. Reena Berger Natenberg, for “Carnival of the Animals” by Camille Saint-Saens.

“In this, the composer treats the pianists like animals,” Giray said. “Lions, hens and roosters, wild donkeys, tortoises, an elephant and kangaroos are depicted, among other creatures.”

“It’s a very beautiful piece,” Natenberg said. “When Dr. Giray said that he wanted to do it, I suggested Gulimina.”

“Dr. Natenberg called and told me of the opportunity to perform this piece,” Mahamuti said. “I was so excited, especially because Dr. Natenberg was my teacher.”

The two women met in August 2004 in China, at the Harbin Summer Music Festival.

“I gave some concerts there, then went Gulimina’s school and gave master classes,” Natenberg said.

At that point, Mahamuti had already earned a bachelor of music in piano performance from the Northwest University for Nationalities in Lanzhou, China, and a master of music in piano performance and piano pedagogy from Harbin Normal University. Because she was so impressed by Natenberg, she applied to come to the United States and study at PSU.

Mahamuti studied two years with Natenberg, receiving her second master’s degree in piano performance in 2007.

“I received many warm hearts from the faculty members, and did chamber music with Dr. Giray and Dr. Joanne Britz,” she said. “I feel very honored to be back with Dr. Giray and Dr. Natenberg, and to come back to the school where I studied to perform. This is the place where people are so nice, and it’s the place where I met my husband.”

She is married to Dr. Dung Nguyen, an oncologist.

“He always thanks me, because I invited Gulimina to Pittsburg,” Natenberg said.

On May 8 Mahamuti received her doctorate from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and on Aug. 23 she went to China for a visit. She was surprised at the attention she received.

“I performed in Beijing and was interviewed on television,” she said. “We don’t have a doctoral degree in piano performance in China, so this is rare.”

Mahamuti said she also received attention because she is a Urghur, an ethnic minority group in China.

She now has an active career as a soloist, collaborative pianist and piano teacher, and has performed in the Midwest, East Coast and Canada.

Natenberg has performed as a soloist throughout North and South America, Asia and Europe. She has been featured on radio and television, most notably in a



PHOTO/ SEAN STEFFEN/THE MORNING SUN

Dr. Gulimina Mahamuti, front, and Dr. Reena Berger Natenberg practice “The Carnival of the Animals” by Camille Saint-Saens. They will perform the piece during the Southeast Kansas Symphony concert at 3 p.m. Sunday in Pittsburg Memorial Auditorium. The concert will open the symphony’s 2010-2011 season.

TV documentary pertaining to Czech culture, playing the piano pieces of Smetana and Martinu, and on the WGBH program "Off the Record" in Boston.

Natenberg is delighted to be sharing the stage with her former student and friend, but someone even closer will also be with her. She and her husband, Todd Natenberg, are expecting twin boys.

"My sons will be part of this concert," she said.

The concert will begin with Adolphe-Charles Adam's overture to "Si j'étais roi," and Faure's "Pelleas et Melisande Suite." The third piece, Debussy's "Premiere Rhapsodie for Clarinet and Orchestra," will feature Clayton Dunaway on clarinet. A senior music education major from Joplin, he has served as principal and second clarinetist in the symphony and as principal clarinetist for the PSU Wind Ensemble and Chamber Winds since 2006.

"We're also very pleased to have Deborah Clark, harpist with the Kansas City Symphony, who will play the harp for us," Giray said.

Concert tickets will be \$5 for senior citizens and \$7 for other adults. PSU students with valid ID will be admitted free, as will children under 12 when accompanied by an adult. Tickets may be purchased in advance at the PSU Ticket Office in the Overman Student Center, or at the door an hour prior to the performance.

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