

Rising star plays with CSO

His musicianship is described as prodigious, his career meteoric and, even at a young age, his reputation formidable.

Emmanuel Despax, this week's guest soloist with the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra, is one of the world's most acclaimed pianists of his generation. While the young Frenchman's performances have sent critics into verbal tailspins ("his playing augurs well for a stellar career", one wrote recently), his passion and commitment to works ranging from Mozart to Ravel has won him something of a cult following among younger concert goers.

While Despax has made his home in England, his career takes him around the world. He embraces the cultural opportunities London offers but what chiefly draws him to Britain is his teacher, Ruth Nye, who first heard him when he auditioned for the Yehudi Menuhin School.

Emmanuel Despax was born in France and had his first piano lessons at the age of nine before passing the entrance exam to the Conservatoire Darius Milhaud in Aix-en-Provence. From the age of 13, he continued his studies in the United Kingdom, where he gained a place at the Menuhin School. During five years at the school, Despax appeared in concerts, both as a soloist and as a chamber musician at the Royal Festival Hall, the Queen Elizabeth Hall and the Wigmore Hall.

In 2002 he was awarded a scholarship to the Royal College of Music, where he continued his piano studies with Ruth Nye. In his second year, as winner of the RCM concerto trials, he performed the Brahms *Piano Concerto No 1*. In his third year, he won a clutch of major awards, including the RCM's most prestigious prize, the Tagore gold medal.



Prodigious talent:
Emmanuel Despax.
Photo: CLIVE BARDA

Despax continues to give recitals throughout Europe.

Recent engagements include concert performances of Tchaikovsky's *Concerto for Piano No 1* with the RCM Sinfonietta and Chopin's *Piano Concerto No 1* with

the London Festival Orchestra.

■ Emmanuel Despax will be guest soloist with the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra in a performance of Schumann's *Piano Concerto in A minor*. 8pm, Saturday,

May 2 in the Christchurch Town Hall. Other works in the programme include Rautavaara's *Cantus Arcticus*, Beethoven's *Sixth Symphony* and the premiere of a new work commissioned by the CSO. Tom Woods conducts. Book at Ticketek.