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## One to watch *Emmanuel Despax*

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**EMMANUEL DESPAX** learned the piano with his mother before entering the Conservatoire Darius Milhaud in Aix-en-Provence, France, studying with Michel Bourdoncle and Florence Belraouti. At 13 he trained with Ruth Nye at the Yehudi Menuhin School in the UK, then entered the Royal College of Music and made his London debut performing Brahms's First Concerto under Andrew Litton with the RCM Symphony Orchestra.

Since graduating in 2006 he has performed across Europe, including dates at the Fazioli Auditorium in Italy, the Gasteig Blackbox in Munich and the Palais des Beaux Arts in Belgium. He participated in the Virtuoso Pianists series at Cadogan Hall, UK, and on tour in New Zealand he appeared at the Fazioli International Series in Auckland.

In 2009 Despax won the Dudley International Piano Competition playing Brahms's First Concerto with the City of Birmingham SO conducted by Michael Seal. Upcoming highlights include concerts at the Salle Gaveau and Louvre Auditorium in Paris, and the Fazioli Auditorium in Italy. In September 2010 he will give his third Wigmore Hall recital.

I was a shy child and discovered early on that I could express myself more easily through music. We had an old upright in the house and I used to love playing it. My mother plays the piano and my dad loves opera, but they never pushed me to become a pianist. It was something I decided to do. Somehow I knew that this strange object in the living room would become a crucial part of my life.

I learned piano with my mother and later studied at the Yehudi Menuhin School where my teacher was Ruth Nye. She is one of the great students of Claudio Arrau and a phenomenal musician. She doesn't try to mould her students, but allows them the freedom to develop their musical vision. If you are to become an artist you must dare to explore the score; there is no point in becoming a soloist unless you have something to say. This symbiosis between respecting the score and projecting a personal interpretation is a lifetime's journey. Arrau said one should not attempt a single Beethoven piano sonata until one knows all of his music. It's an extreme statement but he does have a point in that you cannot be a good interpreter until you have immersed yourself in the composer's world.

I tend to like pieces rather than composers, although I feel close to Beethoven, Liszt, Brahms and the German

### FORTHCOMING CONCERTS

**19 September 2010** Wigmore Hall, London, UK  
Recital includes Musorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition, Chopin Barcarolle in F sharp op.60 and Etudes op.10

**3 October 2010** 3pm Assembly Hall Theatre, Tunbridge Wells, UK  
Royal Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestra. Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto no.1 in B flat minor op.23

**2011** Recitals at the Salle Gaveau, Paris and in the South of France; Wigmore Hall, London, UK; Fazioli Auditorium, Italy; Louvre Auditorium, Paris, France; recital tour of Australia (all details tba)

Romantics. I also play Bach, Scarlatti, French repertoire and modern music. For my upcoming Wigmore recital I will play the Bach-Busoni Chorale Prelude in F minor 'Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ' and Bach-Hess 'Jesu bleibet meine Freude' from Cantata BWV147 and Musorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and an all-Chopin second half. The piano original of *Pictures* has been criticised for being 'awkward', but that is to misunderstand the work: it is an orchestral score written for the piano, and is an extremely successful musical description of a series of paintings. I will also play Chopin's Etudes op.10, which are like twelve poems for the piano. The last great recording of the op.10 was made by Cortot, and there are many wrong notes, but there is more poetry in those wrong notes than in many technically impeccable performances.

Winning the Dudley Competition was great, especially playing the Brahms First with the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. Competitions have their place, but more important than winning is having something to say. You must have complete conviction about what you are communicating when you step out onto the stage. It's not about pleasing the audience, it's about saying what you believe. After all, the great artists have always divided opinion.'

INTERVIEW BY CHLOE CUTTS