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Pianist mixes new works with familiar masters

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The haunting notes of a Debussy composition can paint a picture in the imagination, note by note.

For Nantucket-born pianist Stephen Porter, the music takes on another layer of meaning after learning the stories of the composers.

He believes that once you understand Debussy's close relationship with impressionist painters of the era, you begin to hear more behind his rich and melodic illustrations for the ear.

"Debussy was often called an impressionist. These are pieces that can amazingly evoke the visual," said Porter, who will perform works by Debussy, Franz Liszt and Frederic Chopin Saturday in the Great Hall of the Nantucket Atheneum.

By closing your eyes and taking in the iconic strains of Debussy's "Claire de Lune," the music seems to take shape in the mind's eye, moving and shifting in a deliberate and elegant way, carrying away the listener through its melodic progressions, he believes.

Porter makes his home in Boston, but was the artist in residence earlier this year at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris for the third



Photo by Kathy Chapmar

Nantucket-born pianist Stephen Porter will perform works by Debussy, Liszt and Chopin Saturday in the Great Hall of the Nantucket Atheneum on India Street.

time. He has appeared as a soloist in London, Paris, Sarajevo, Istanbul and Rio de Janeiro.

As he was creating the program for his musical return to the island, he noticed that many of the pieces centered on water and he decided to embrace the theme.

In addition to Debussy's "Reflections in the Water" and "Goldfish,"

Liszt's "The Fountains of the Villa d'Este" and "St. Francis of Paola Marching On the Waves" will also be performed during the free concert.

"There's a bit of water imagery running through the program, which is appropriate, I think, for Nantucket," Porter said. "All of these composers do an amazing job evoking visual landscapes. They're such

master composers, the thing about these pieces is they require every technique on the piano."

Though he is known for his powerful renditions of Debussy, his passion has lately turned to the works of Liszt. He feels a deep connection to the 19th century composer because of the enormous breadth and

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