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Boaz Sharon returns, Petty gets nostalgic

Dunnellon is scooping Beijing. Before classical pianist Boaz Sharon embarks on his upcoming concerts in China, he will debut his new program Sunday at one of his favorite venues — Dunnellon Presbyterian Church. The free recital starts at 3 p.m.

Sharon is an internationally touring pianist (if it's not Russia, it's China; if it's not China, it's . . .) and recording artist. He has conducted masterclasses in Israel, England, South America, Russia and the United States. He is also president of the Israeli Liszt Society and, at one point, served as artistic director for the Prague International Piano Masterclass.

But, he does have a day job.

That would be as "Professor Sharon," the mild-mannered head of the University of Florida's Piano Area. He is soft-spoken yet outspoken; that is to say, this sublime musician also is tenacious in his quests to build musical bridges across the pond and fill UF's Music Department with Steinway pianos.

He performs at fundraisers and recitals from Gainesville to New York City to make UF one of the few All-Steinway schools.

Sharon is no stranger to Dunnellon Presbyterian Church; he said he has played there at least eight times. "It's just a lovely place to play," he said.

As for that Dunnellon scoop? Sharon's program will include works Schubert, Chopin (selection of Etudes), Franz Liszt, Fats Waller and Prokofiev.

POST-PETTY

WRAP-UP

Speaking of Gainesville musicians . . .

Last week, **Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers** played a breathing-room-only, 30th anniversary concert in Gainesville — the band's hometown.

These guys, Petty included, returned home gracious and overwhelmed by the crowd (which included oodles of Ocalaans, by the way). It had been 13 years since the band last played their hallowed hometown, and the media — myself, included — made a huge deal about the concert's historical and emotional significance.

The show attracted lots of media attention, CNN aired a snippet from the show, and Westwood One aired the concert that night on more than 100 radio stations, playing heavy on the homecoming angle.

But at the press conference, Petty didn't seem to revel in the dreamy-eyed nostalgia the media — especially myself — pushed so hard for. He had been in Gainesville, his birthplace, for more than two days at that point, toured the area, visited with friends and family.

When asked to describe what



Classical pianist and UF professor Boaz Sharon performs in Dunnellon on Sunday afternoon.

BOAZ SHARON

WHEN: 3 p.m. Sunday

WHERE: Dunnellon Presbyterian Church, 20641 Chestnut St., Dunnellon

COST: Free; donations accepted

it was like to return, he said Gainesville was "a lot bigger, a lot of strip malls." He capped his answer by calling the city "beautiful" and noted he

missed the old Florida Theater (now a dance club).

Perhaps it was just Petty's distinct, sleepy monotone. Perhaps he was just sleepy (this is the third leg of an exhausting anniversary tour for a group of gray-

ing rockers).

But onstage, Petty was clearly touched, he could barely address the crowd through the deafening hoots, hollers and foot stomps launched every time he approached the microphone to speak.

"Thank you so much, man. Just incredible," he said, dwarfed by the noise powered by 16,000 feet stomping in a big dome "Ah, man. Gainesville, Florida — I hear ya."

He strode across stage with a large grin and open arms, soaking it all in.

I could write endlessly about this show. It was as moving for the crowd as it was for the Heartbreakers.

The band was as tight as I had ever heard them. They played all their classics, dipped into some of, but not enough of, Petty's phenomenal new solo CD, brought Stevie Nicks onstage and even played some of the old Yardbirds/Bo Diddley-era tunes they used to play in Gainesville garages more than 30 years ago.

But I will spare you the prose I have been itching to write since that night. Instead, I'll empty my notebook, offering a few notes and nuggets from the concert and the press conference.

● "I'm a native of Gainesville, and think there is no one big-

■ **Petty continues:** Rocker misses former members. 14

Sharon does have a day job — "Professor Sharon," the mild-mannered head of the University of Florida's Piano Area.

DAVE SCHLENKER



Gainesville native Tom Petty responds to the hometown crowd at last week's concert at the O'Connell Center.

Petty notes, quotes and encores

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ger than Tom Petty," Gainesville Mayor Pegeen Hanrahan said before presenting the band keys to the city

● "It's a lot nicer than Chicago's, I'll tell you that," Petty said upon receiving his key to Gainesville

● At the press conference, Hanrahan mentioned Petty's cousin, Sadie Darnell, a former Gainesville police captain who is running for Alachua County sheriff Petty chimed in. "So you know who we're going to vote for" Incidentally, Petty and most, if not all, of the Heartbreakers live in Southern California — slightly west of Darnell's district.

● One reporter asked what is in store for the band's 31st year. Petty answered: "Sleep."

● "We miss Howie and Stan," Petty said at the press conference. He was answering more questions about his thoughts on returning to Gainesville, and he was referring to bassist Howie Epstein, who died in 2003 following a long struggle with drugs, and Stan Lynch, the Heartbreakers' original drummer who left the band in 1994 and is now a successful songwriter living in northeast Florida

● Asked about today's music compared to the music he grew up with, Petty said: "Every generation goes for something parents can't stand . . . I do like the idea (my generation) was about love and peace and not going on about b***** and murders." He said he was not criticizing today's music, only noting it was a reflection of the times —

"Poetry is poetry," he said.

● On stage, the band performed a bittersweet, almost haunting version of the ballad "Southern Accents." Like most of the songs performed that night, more than 8,000 people sang along word for word. But the first time Petty sang the line " — with a southern accent/ Where I come from," the hometown crowd went nuts.

● Encores. "You Wreck Me," Van Morrison's "Mystic Eyes" (featuring a gorgeous, breathtaking piano solo from Benmont Tench) and — of course — "American Girl."

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ROBERT MITZEL/THE GAINESVILLE SUN

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers perform at UF's O'Connell Center in Gainesville last week. The Gainesville-bred band is celebrating its 30 anniversary.