

## Asbury Park Press

*Gallagher is far from typical*, BY CARLTON WILKINSON, CORRESPONDENT, February 17, 2008

As part of its series presenting emerging classical artists, Red Bank's Two River Theater Company will be hosting a concert by pianist Kimball Gallagher at 8 p.m. Saturday.

The program will include a to-be-announced premiere, plus work by early 20th century American Impressionist Charles Griffes and the living, California-based composer Nolan Gasser. Along with these lesser-known pieces will be traditional piano fare, highlighted by a set of mazurkas by Frederic Chopin.

Gallagher is of a new breed of classical musicians who aren't bound to the canon of classical music in the same way as older pianists. He has given thrilling performances of Bartok's "Piano Concerto No. 3" and has a solo Carnegie Hall debut, at Weill Recital Hall, coming up in March.

But he also is a songwriter dabbling in popular styles and a collaborator with numerous composers, developing new work for the repertoire. His Carnegie Hall debut, in fact, will feature the premiere of a work by David Del Tredici, famed as the composer of the 1974 soprano and orchestra piece "Final Alice."

In other ways, too, Gallagher also is not tied to the same way of doing things. He is the founder of an organization called Piano Key, which sponsors salon-style concerts by piano soloists in homes across North America. He reportedly bought his first piano recently, sponsored by soliciting 88 private donations – one for each key on the instrument.

A graduate of Rice University in Houston and the Juilliard School in New York, Gallagher is a New York City resident. He is the winner of the Corpus Christi International Piano Competition, and he was a finalist in the Washington International Competition.

Gallagher's program for the Two River Theater is grounded in tradition, opening with a Haydn sonata. But even in this program there is a refreshing change for classical music fans in this area. When do we get to hear an entire set of mazurkas, for instance? When do we ever get a chance to hear work by Griffes?

The mazurkas are one-movement pieces for piano solo that Chopin modeled on traditional dances from his native Poland. These little tone poems are devilish, requiring nuances that can't be written down, particularly the use of rubato – a slight slowing down and speeding up to give the phrase more depth and character. Many people believe that Chopin was at his best in these small-scale structures, creating an engaging complex of traditional and forward-looking musical ideas. Also to be played is Chopin's "Sonata No. 2" (containing the "Funeral March").

Long after his death at the ripe age of 35, the American composer Griffes remains virtually

unknown in his own country. His most famous work is the "Pleasure Dome of Kubla Khan," originally written for piano but arranged for orchestra. He also is more well known among fans of art song, a genre to which he made significant contributions and influenced others.

When he died in 1920, Griffes was riding the crest of a wave of popularity. Still under the sway of old world masters, his style was becoming increasingly personal. Had he lived, he would probably have gone on to become one of the country's great composers.

The California-based composer Gasser is not yet well known, but he has had work performed at Alice Tully Hall in New York and La Salle Pleyel in Paris, among other venues. He serves as artistic director of a Web site called Classical Archives, a public repository of some 40,000-plus examples of music from classical music history in various file formats.

In addition, Gasser is a musicologist, with a Ph.D. from Stanford University in Palo Alto, Calif., where he also teaches medieval and renaissance music history. Gasser's work tends to be accessible, and he has been quoted as saying he wants to reach people "where they live" rather than trying to educate an audience to a more elite style. Gallagher will play Gasser's "Three Jazz Preludes."