



Conductor Benjamin Zander will treat Capetonians to a whirlwind concert as part of Mandela's 90th birthday celebrations

# Zander's pathway to glory

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Capetonians will get the opportunity to see and hear one of the world's greatest conductors and ambassadors for classical music when Anglo-American conductor Benjamin Zander jets in for a whirlwind concert tour with the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra (CPO).

Zander is a conductor of high esteem and made his name particularly as an interpreter of the music of Gustav Mahler. He has held the position of music director at the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra since 1979 and teaches at the New England Conservatory of Music.

But it is as public speaker that Zander is setting himself apart from his peers. He has built a reputation for taking the stuffy and dull traditional pre-concert talk and turning it into a message that is part

motivational and part evangelical. Zander has appeared four times as key-note speaker at the World Economic Forum in Davos, an unusual and impressive feat for a musician. He is certainly not reluctant to play the evangelist role, claiming that "everybody loves classical music, they just haven't found out about it yet".

Cape Town will see this clearly in the Classical Fever concert on August 24 when he will take the orchestra through highlights from the orchestral repertoire. Zander says he aims to "explain the *Coriolan Overture* of Beethoven and Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*, to show how Mozart and Mahler can be brought to life". He says he will "demonstrate that people with no musical training can hear seven voices simultaneously".

August 23 sees the first in the series of concerts, a celebration of the popular repertoire guaranteed to draw the crowds, is centred on Rachmaninov's *Piano Concerto No 2*. This consistently successful work will be bookended by Beethoven's *Coriolan Overture* and by Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Both of these have enough grandeur, depth and subtlety to keep both casual and intense audiences engaged. The other international star flying in is Venezuelan pianist Gabriela Montero, who will be the soloist in both the *Emperor* and the Rachmaninov piece and presents a solo recital on August 29 at Cape Town's Centre for the Book. Here the programme will be made up of her own improvisations based on classical themes. In doing so she is virtually single-handedly continuing an almost-lost tradition of keyboard improvisation dating back through Beethoven, Mozart and Bach.

The main event takes place on August 24 when the CPO joins the New Apostolic Church Choir and the City of Tygerberg Choir under Zander's baton in an epic Beethoven celebration. In the first half of the programme Montero will give her reading of the triumphant *Emperor Piano Concerto* and following that will be the *Ninth Symphony* with soloists Sabina Mossilow (soprano), Violina Anguelov (mezzo-soprano), Siphon Fubesi (tenor) and Theo Magongoma (bass baritone).

Zander raves about his soloist. "Everything she plays is touched with the magic of improvisation," he says. "You have to stay on your toes all the time because her quick-silver brain picks up glories and intricacies in the music at every moment and you have to be willing to go with her."

The gala concert is dedicated to Nelson Mandela and forms part of his 90th birthday celebrations. Zander drew a comparison between Mandela's life story and the message of Beethoven's music, particularly the *Ninth Symphony*. "Beethoven teaches us that however much we suffer and however hard the struggle, there is always a pathway to glory and triumph. The *Ninth Symphony* is a celebration of the brotherhood of man: *alle Menschen werden Brüder* (all human beings are as brothers)."

"We forget it sometimes, in the heat of the moment, but let Beethoven remind us."