

`PRESIDENTS' CONCERT DEFTLY BLENDS OLD, NEW

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Boston's business leaders, including Governor Mitt Romney and Mayor Thomas Menino, attended last night's "Presidents at Pops" concert at Symphony Hall. The event raised \$1.25 million for the Boston Symphony Orchestra and its community outreach efforts and featured a mingling of new and old musical traditions.

Technology's contribution to sound was well-served in the world premiere of "Jeux Deux," a concerto for the computer-enhanced "HyperPiano," written by **Tod Machover** of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Lab. But it was counterbalanced by a festive, ancient-feeling set from Cape Breton folkie Natalie MacMaster, who dynamically turned the Boston Pops Orchestra's violins into fiddles for the night. Anticipation was high for Machover's "Jeux Deux," a stirring piece that proved the HyperPiano a Yamaha grand customized with computer mechanisms could make emotionally evocative music rather than be a sterile side show. Machover and Pops conductor Keith Lockhart discussed the music before it began, with Lockhart telling the crowd "I guarantee you've never heard anything quite like this before." He joked about the orchestra being "stubbornly analog" with some members playing "300-year-old instruments," but it was a welcome sign of openmindedness that the orchestra delved into this unusual concerto at all.

Michael Chertock played the HyperPiano, opening with a rumbling ostinato pattern, as the internal computerization triggered other notes that showered around it. The piece moved from dark to calming, before the orchestra added some surprisingly effective dissonance in what was a beguiling emotional rollercoaster. And the HyperPiano never got too loud, though it was clear that if Keith Emerson of Emerson, Lake & Palmer had ever gotten hold of this, we'd all be deaf by now.

The music was enhanced by interactive graphics on a rear video screen, as Marc Downie, stationed at a computer by the soundboard, improvised images much like a technician does at laser rock shows at planetariums.

MacMaster's subsequent set was an organic delight spiced with nimble fiddling on jigs and slow airs ("If Ever You Were Mine" glistened), along with a passionate folk/classical exchange with Pops violinist Tamara Smirnova. And the show peaked for the many corporate chiefs in attendance with Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, coolly conducting "The Stars and Stripes Forever."

Lockhart looked on gleefully, knowing the night had been a banner success.