Lockhart returns with BBC Orchestra

Famous Furman alum loves 'coming home' to perform

By Paul Hyde
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Keith Lockhart is not only an internationally renowned orchestral conductor, he's also a good friend to Greenville.

A Furman alum, Lockhart frequently returns to Greenville with a world-class orchestra in tow, most notably the Boston Pops, which he has led since 1995.

On Saturday, Lockhart is bringing the London-based BBC Concert Orchestra to Furman with a program of "popular classics."

Lockhart in August was appointed principal conductor of the orchestra, known for its large repertoire that ranges from traditional works to soundtracks and pop music. He continues to lead the Boston Pops while also serving as artistic director of the Brevard Music Center in Brevard, N.C.

Featured works on Saturday include Prokofiev's "Classical Symphony," Stravinsky's "Firebird" Suite and Rachmaninoff's Piano Concert No. 2, with Ilya Yakushev as soloist.

The orchestra, under Lockhart's direction, is in the middle of a 20-day concert tour of the U.S. east coast.

The Greenville News caught up with Lockhart, who turned 51 on Sunday, as he journeyed with the BBC Concert Orchestra on one of its chartered buses, somewhere between Schenectady, N.Y., and Fairfax, Va.

Lockhart says he's thrilled to take the helm of the BBC Concert Orchestra, commending the British ensemble for its "virtuosity, flexibility and commitment."

Question: Can you tell us about the challenges — and excitement — associated with maintaining a busy schedule with orchestras and other commitments across the Atlantic?

Answer: The toughest thing about the BBC job is staying involved in the ongoing life of

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YOU CAN GO

- **What:** BBC Concert Orchestra, led by Keith Lockhart
- **When:** 8 p.m. Saturday
- **Where:** McAlister Auditorium, Furman University, 1300 Duncan Chapel Road
- **Tickets:** $45-$55
- **Information:** 294-3097 or 1-800-745-3000 or timmonsarena.com



Keith Lockhart, a Furman alumnus and principal conductor of the BBC Concert Orchestra, brings the orchestra to Greenville this week with a program of "popular classics."

POPS

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the orchestra. I work with them for concentrated periods of time, and then am gone for significant stretches. The toughest thing about having three different appointments is keeping them all straight and making sure that I am responding to the needs of each. I'm excited to have a bit of a musical beachhead in Europe, as my career has always been rather North America-based.

Q: How is the repertoire of the BBC Concert Orchestra similar or dissimilar to the repertoire of the Boston Pops?

A: If anything, the BBC Concert Orchestra performs an even wider variety of repertoire than the Pops! We frequently perform entire programs of classical symphonic music — like the program your readers will hear in Greenville — something which figures only rarely in the life of the Pops. The CO does a lot of soundtracking (Blue Planet and Planet Earth) as well as collaborations with contemporary artists (Jonny Greenwood of Radiohead is our composer-in-residence). What both orchestras have in common, though, is an ability to quickly assimilate music over an incredible range of styles.



Pianist Ilya Yakushev performs as soloist with the BBC Orchestra in Greenville.

Q: How is the experience of conducting a British orchestra similar or dissimilar to conducting an American one?

A: Orchestras do vary quite a bit — from country to country, and just from one orchestra to the next. British orchestras are known to be "quick studies." The highly competitive freelance environment that most of these players developed in produces people who get it right the first time. They are also very affable, and the atmosphere in rehearsal is relaxed and joyous.

Q: You always seem to make time for a Furman concert during your tours — whether with the Boston Pops or now the BBC Concert Orchestra. This area must be a sentimental favorite for you.

A: Furman has been very good at facilitating campus appearances by both the Pops and the BBC Concert Orchestra. I love coming home. I'm honored that Furman is proud of me as an alumnus, and I'm proud to be an alumnus.

Q: How did you go about choosing the works for this series of concerts?

A: We started with knowing that we wanted a pianist on both programs, and we engaged the truly extraordinary young Russian, Ilya Yakushev. This was billed as a program of "popular classics," and what could fit that bill better than the Second Rachmaninoff concerto?

Q: Your biography on the BBC Concert Orchestra Web site mentions your "love of all things British." Can you elaborate?

A: That rather fanciful turn of phrase was, alas, not written by me! I suppose it's a bit of an overstatement. Things I love that are British: British music — I've done quite a bit of Vaughan Williams, Walton and Britten, and have done U.S. premieres of works by Malcolm Arnold

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