

Sunday 19th July at the Chateau at 17h

Constant Despres, piano, was born in 2006, to an Indian mother and a French father, into a family of musicians, whose eclectic tastes ranged from Miles Davis to Ravi Shankar as well as Wagner and Chopin. He was enrolled into the Conservatoire de Toulouse when he was 5 years old.

Prizewinner in fifteen competitions, he was also interested in the visual arts, winning, four times, the Grand Prix for Best Video in the Music and Stars Awards. When he was eleven, he played in « Prodiges le Grand Concert », accompanied by the Orchestre Nationale de Lille in front of 45,000 spectators, and at the Halle aux Grains in Toulouse, Mozart's Concert No 23, with the Orchestre du Royaume d' Aragon.

He has been invited to play in numerous festivals, such as : Piano Pic, les Arts Renaissants, Festival de Comminges, les Pianissimes, Piano en Valois, l'Esprit du Piano, Jazz in Marciac, Festival de Toulouse...

He has studied with Jacques Rouvier, François-Frédéric Guy, David Fray, Jérôme Granjon and François Chaplin.

After being awarded his Prix de Piano, Highly Commended, and his Prix de Musique de Chambre at the Conservatoire de Toulouse, he entered, aged 15, the Conservatoire Supérieur de Musique et de Danse in Paris, in the class of Marie-Josèphe Jude, where, in 2025, he was awarded his Degree, Highly Commended.

With the great Cuban pianist, Rolando Luna, he founded the highly original duo, Rolando & Constant, combining Classical Music with Jazz, releasing a CD in 2025, on the « Esprit du Piano » label.

This collaboration with the jazzman convinced him that music knows no boundaries, and he went on to share the stage with the mandolin-player Julien Martineau, and also the trumpeter Bernard Soustrot.

The composers Corentin Apparailly and Christian Lauba have both created contemporary works for him.

Julien Martineau is one of the greatest and most remarkable mandolin players of our time. Passionately devoted to his instrument, he has seriously enriched the repertoire of the mandolin, by commissioning new works from composers, as well as creating numerous transcriptions of his own of major works from the classical repertoire.

When he was 19, he won the Guiseppe Anedda Prize at the International Competition in Varazze, Italy in 1998.

He was invited to play solo at the «Victoires de la Musique Classique », and made his debut on the media with the Philharmonic Orchestra of Radio France, conducted by Rinaldo Alessandrani, with whom he recorded the concertos of Vivaldi and Calace, on the Naive label. In 2021, he was appointed Honorary Conductor of the Mandolin Society of America, the largest and most prestigious organisation in the world devoted to the mandolin. In 2022 he was President of the jury at the International Mandolin Competition in Tokyo.

He has performed, in concert, with major orchestras in Toulouse, Bordeaux, Lisbon, Heilbronn....not only showing his technical brilliance but also demonstrating the delicacy of his instrument, also playing in recitals at the Théâtre du Chatelet, Théâtre du Champs-Élysées, Grand Théâtre de Provence, la Halle aux Grains à Toulouse, la Victoria Hall in Geneva, as well as in Russia and Japan.

With his chosen musical partners he has presented many innovative performances such as a programme of sonatas for mandolin from the 18th Century to the Present Day with the pianist Bertrand Chamayou. He has accompanied the singers Natalie Dessai, Sabine Devieille, Thomas Hampson, Florian Sempey and Laurent Naouri and, in 2016, he performed the Premiere of the Concerto for Mandolin, dedicated to him by its composer, Karol Beffa. He has also recorded the complete *Préludes* of Raffaele Calace – the equivalent for solo mandolin of the Paganini's *Caprices* ! -- performed on Radio France 2 with one of his regular collaborators, the pianist and composer Jean-François Zygel.

His new album of concertos, recorded with the National Orchestra of Toulouse (on the Naive label), as well as the musical tale, « The Mandolin of Lviv » by Thierry Huillet and Clara Cernat, narrated by Julie Dépardieu and published by Privat/Gallimard, have just been released. His fascination with the instrument also extends to a serious interest in its construction. For several years he has been working with Savarez, the leading manufacturer of guitar strings in the world, with the aim of developing new strings for the mandolin, using the latest technologies : the instrument he is now playing was conceived and made by one of the great stringed-instrument makers working today, the Canadian, Brian N. Dean.

As founder and Artistic Director of the Festival de Toulouse, Julien was awarded Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres in 2024. He has also received the Déodat de Séverac Prize from the Académie du Languedoc. He is Professor of Mandolin at the Conservatoire de Toulouse, as well as Senior Lecturer in Musicology at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique in Paris.