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PERFORMING ARTS

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ROBERT McDUFFIE AND CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR

Christopher Taylor's piano playing is so full-bodied, incisive and arrestingly phrased that only an equally commanding chamber music partner has any hope of drawing audience attention away from the keyboard. Violinist Robert McDuffie proved a good match for him at a recital on Sunday at the Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater, *offering lean, muscular tone and an extroverted personality* that brought out all the earthy vigor in Stravinsky's "Suite Italienne." Beethoven's Violin and Piano Sonata No. 4 *felt as if shot from a cannon, so energized was the pair's response to the turbulence in the score.* And if the ear kept getting drawn to Taylor's mesmerizing intensity, part of the fault is the composer's, with the piano so often taking the upper hand in the dialogue.

After intermission, Taylor and McDuffie were joined by an ensemble of flute, clarinet, cello and two percussionists -- all under the baton of Michael Barrett -- for "The Time Gallery" by contemporary American composer Paul Moravec. This hefty but engaging work deals with mechanical divisions and distorted perceptions of time. If the composer's description of the piece in the program might have led one to expect a dry study of musical mathematics, Moravec's neo-romantic style evoked audience-friendly composers such as David Del Tredici, John Adams -- even Astor Piazzolla at times -- while speaking its own bustling, virtuosic language that put the players through their paces and sustained interest throughout a nearly hour-long running time.

-- Joe Banno