
Benjamin Hochman
piano, conductor
"Elegant, polished, and heartfelt."
— The Boston Globe

KIRSHBAUM ASSOCIATES INC.
307 SEVENTH AVENUE SUITE 506 NEW YORK NY 10001 (212) 222-4843 TEL (212) 222-7321 FAX WWW.KIRSHBAUMASSOCIATES.COM

BENJAMIN HOCHMAN
Pianist and conductor
2023-2024 Biography

In all roles, from orchestral soloist, recitalist and chamber musician to conductor, Benjamin Hochman regards music as vital and essential. Composers, fellow musicians, orchestras and audiences recognize his deep commitment to insightful programming and performances of quality.

Highlights of 2024–2025 include Hochman conducting the Szeged Philharmonic in Hungary and the Orlando Philharmonic in Florida. He appears as piano soloist in Beethoven *Piano Concerto No. 3* with the Rheinische Staatsphilharmonie conducted by Benjamin Shwartz in Germany and Gershwin *Rhapsody in Blue* with the South Florida Philharmonic conducted by Sebrina Alfonso.

His new album, *Resonance,* will be released by Avie Records on November 1, 2024. It includes Beethoven *Piano Sonatas Op. 109* and *110,* George Benjamin's *Shadowlines,* and works by Josquin de Prez and John Dowland. Album release recitals take place in Berlin, Bard College New York, and Tel Aviv.

His chamber music collaborations take him to Berlin, Budapest, Vancouver, Boston, Seattle, Dallas, Charlottesville, The Clark in Massachusetts, and Brown University. He curates the Kurtág Festival at Bard College New York.

Born in Jerusalem in 1980, Hochman's musical foundation is laid in his teenage years. Claude Frank at the Curtis Institute of Music and Richard Goode at the Mannes School of Music prove defining influences. At the invitation of Mitsuko Uchida, he spends three formative summers at the Marlboro Music Festival.

At 24, Hochman debuts as soloist with the Israel Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall conducted by Pinchas Zukerman. Orchestral appearances follow with the New York Philharmonic, Chicago and Pittsburgh Symphonies, and Prague Philharmonia under conductors including Gianandrea Noseda, Trevor Pinnock, David Robertson, and John Storgårds.

A winner of Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Career Grant, Hochman performs at venues and festivals across the globe, including the Philharmonie in Berlin, Vienna Konzerthaus, the Kennedy Center in Washington, Suntory Hall in Tokyo, Germany's Klavierfestival Ruhr, and Lucerne and Verbier festivals in Switzerland.

In 2015, Hochman developes an auto-immune condition affecting his left hand. He decides to pursue his longstanding interest in conducting, studying with Alan Gilbert at Juilliard where he is granted the Bruno Walter Scholarship and the Charles Schiff Award. He assists Louis Langrée, Paavo Järvi, and

Edo De Waart and creates the Roosevelt Island Orchestra, consisting of some of New York's finest orchestral and chamber musicians alongside promising young talent from top conservatories. Invitations to conduct the orchestras of Santa Fe Pro Musica, Greater Bridgeport Symphony, Orlando, and The Orchestra Now at Bard New York follow.

Fully recovered, Hochman re-emerges as pianist in 2018. He records Mozart *Piano Concertos Nos. 17* and *24*, playing and directing the English Chamber Orchestra (Avie Records). He presents the complete Mozart Piano Sonatas at the Israel Conservatory in Tel Aviv, performs Beethoven sonatas for Daniel Barenboim as part of a filmed workshop at the Pierre Boulez Saal in Berlin, and plays both Beethoven and Kurtág for Kurtág himself at the Budapest Music Centre.

Hochman is a Steinway Artist and a Lecturer at Bard College Berlin.

PLEASE DO NOT ALTER THIS BIOGRAPHY WITHOUT PRIOR APPROVAL
AUGUST 2024 - PLEASE DESTROY ALL PREVIOUSLY DATED MATERIALS

KIRSHBAUM
ASSOCIATES INC.
711 WEST END AVENUE SUITE 5KN NEW YORK NY 10025 (212) 222-4843 TEL (212) 222-7321 FAX WWW.KIRSHBAUMASSOCIATES.COM

Benjamin Hochman, pianist and conductor
Critical Acclaim

"I kept thinking that classical music doesn't get better than this."
New York Times

"Hochman led the work with refreshing calm, clarity, and friendliness: almost every note seemed to wear a smile."
Boston Globe

"Hochman led the audience through this rugged, majestic landscape with such rhetorical authority that there was no hint of movement among his listeners when he paused between sections. The minute he was done, the audience launched immediately into ovations…"
Washington Post

"There is something very personable about his eloquent, intelligent, and serious manner and elegant flair, which translate into artistic integrity on stage. Whether on the podium, at the keyboard in recital, or performing chamber music, Hochman sees himself mostly as a musician, deeply dedicated to the spirit of collaboration, which also becomes a decisive element in his teaching. Once weekly, he holds a studio class as an educator on the faculty of Bard College. He feels that 'it's all about communication, knowing how to get the best results and how to inspire, whether that's audiences, orchestral collaborators, or students.'"
Get Classical

"Mr. Hochman, whose career as a pianist has been thriving, took time off recently to study conducting. It was time well spent. The stylistic insight, elegance and sparkle of Mr. Hochman's pianism are beautifully matched by the playing of the orchestra. The finale of the Concerto in G, structured in theme and variations form, is exceptionally inventive: Each variation comes as a bit of a surprise."
New York Times

"Elegant, polished, and heartfelt."
Boston Globe

"Pianist Benjamin Hochman was a powerful protagonist in Prokofiev's spiritual odyssey." done, the audience launched immediately into ovations…"
Washington Post

"Hochman's performance with the orchestra was absolutely thrilling, and it will be remembered as a highlight of the BSO's 124th season… Hochman made playing it look easy as his hands seemed to lightly dance up and down the keyboard. Soloist, conductor and orchestra became one in a riveting performance."
Bangor Daily News

"This pianist has an ability to make the piano sing. Hochman is so adept at this demanding technique, especially in the introspective style of late Brahms, that one just wants to weep."
Detroit Free Times

"Fluidity and resiliency were two hallmarks of Mr. Hochman's playing, and they came to the fore immediately in the Praeambulum to Bach's Partita No. 5, executed with the smoothness of cream but the transparency of water."
New York Times

“Benjamin Hochman, making his PSO debut, displayed the sort of Mozartean touch and clean tone that you can’t teach. The Israeli pianist played with attention to line, patience in phrasing (especially in cadenzas) and some of the best trills I have heard. One sublime passage in the first movement had Hochman echoing himself exquisitely, and he switched intuitively from melancholy to upbeat in that temperamental middle movement.”
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

“On the piano they were joined by Benjamin Hochman — stepping in for André Watts, sidelined by tendinitis — whose sensitive playing produced beads of frosted glass in the Adagio and a muscular, impatient drive in the final Allegro.”
New York Times

“A white-heat performance.”
Vancouver Sun

“This was big, bold music making, perfect for the incipient Romantic sensibilities of a composer who still seems to be underplayed even though his fame is universal. Mr. Hochman especially played the stuffing out of [Mendelssohn’s D major] sonata. His solo passagework in the hymnal section of the Adagio was positively inspiring.”
New York Sun

"Barely moving at the piano, he played [Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 9 in E flat major, K.271] with a refreshingly unaffected style, with nicely shaped phrasing and pristine articulation. The slow movement was a highlight, with its smiling-through-tears quality and the pianist's luminous touch in its long-breathed themes."
Cincinnati Enquirer

“Anton Webern’s Variations for Piano Op. 27 were hypnotic in their sharp precision and reflected music as pure as crystal. In the breathtaking playing of Hochman the musical material was brought to abstract wholeness.”
Haaretz (Israel)

“Hochman’s demeanor is poised, and quietly confident. His playing is beautiful to hear. From the first moment, his crisp, articulated touch was noticeable, clear but not forceful, even with pedal, and he shaped the phrases in the long cadenza with grace.”
Seattle Post-Intelligencer

“A superb pianist. The glowing heart of the concert was a performance by Hochman and the Jerusalem Quartet of Schumann’s Piano Quintet. The playing by these five typified the ideal of chamber music as a humane conversation about essential things.”
Globe and Mail

“Hochman has many strengths as a pianist, including an exceedingly elegant touch, thoughtful voicings, and an impeccable sense of meter and rhythm.”
American Record Guide

“Mr. Hochman seems made for Mozart. He played with poise and patience and a round, deep tone that was still nimble and clear.”
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

“Hochman’s playing was serene, virtually Olympian in its overview.”
Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

“Such breathless perfection that time seemed to stand still.”
Kansas City Star

Benjamin Hochman

The New York Times

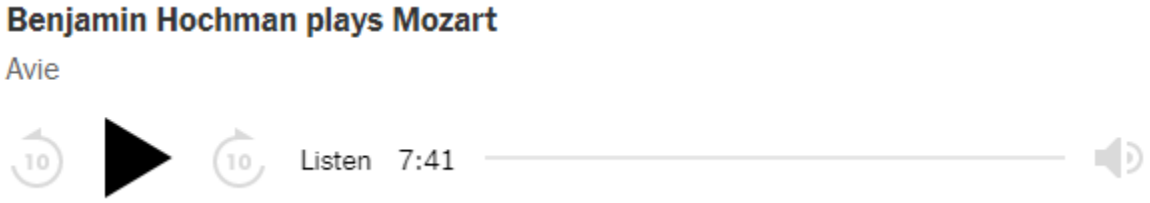
January 4, 2020

Yes, We Need (Yet) Another Rachmaninoff Recording

New accounts of standard works, even those covered by dozens of classic recordings, can still enliven classical music.

By Anthony Tommasini

Mozart
Piano Concertos No. 17 in G and No. 24 in C Minor; Benjamin Hochman, pianist and conductor; English Chamber Orchestra (Avie)



Click to listen or visit https://nyti.ms/36lBQqR

Mr. Hochman, whose career as a pianist has been thriving, took time off recently to study conducting. It was time well spent. The stylistic insight, elegance and sparkle of Mr. Hochman's pianism are beautifully matched by the playing of the orchestra. The finale of the Concerto in G, structured in theme and variations form, is exceptionally inventive: Each variation comes as a bit of a surprise.

Benjamin Hochman

The New York Times

December 11, 2015

The Best Classical Music Recordings of 2015

'VARIATIONS' Benjamin Hochman, piano (Avie). This outstanding Israeli-born pianist explores the theme-and-variations genre here. He gives lucid, exciting performances of variations by Oliver Knussen, Luciano Berio, George Benjamin and Peter Lieberson (all composed between 1982 and 2003), then ends with an exhilarating account of Brahms's Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel. ANTHONY TOMMASINI

Benjamin Hochman

The New York Times

December 14, 2014

BEST OF THE YEAR

THE TIMES'S CRITICS PICK THEIR FAVORITE (AND A FEW NOT-SO-FAVORITE) WORKS

Classical

ANTHONY TOMMASINI

Searing Operas, Adventurous Recitals

Vast halls and small clubs housed the top performances.

SMALL SPACES ARE NOW MAKING ROOM FOR CLASSICAL MUSIC.

Benjamin Hochman, SubCulture One of the newest performance spaces in New York is SubCulture, in the East Village, an acoustically lively, informal hall with seats for 150 and a bar area for drinks and snacks. On one special night, the exciting, inquisitive pianist Benjamin Hochman played a bold program of contemporary theme-and-variations pieces. There were daunting works by Oliver Knussen and Berio, a premiere by Tamar Muskal and, to end, Frederic Rzewski's epic, hourlong, audaciously inventive variations on a Chilean protest song, "The People United Will Never Be Defeated" (1975).

Benjamin Hochman

January 23, 2020

Pianist Benjamin Hochman—"Music is Music"

At 39, Israeli-American pianist Benjamin Hochman is in a good place. The deeply engaging pianist has gained a reputation for excellence, establishing himself on a short list of favorite acts on the New York classical concert scene—a notably tricky space to conquer.

Despite his swift arrival to a career at the crossroads of performing and conducting, it has not exactly been a straight-lined journey for Hochman, who, like many other Israeli talents, left his native Jerusalem for the US on a one-way educational ticket, sponsored by AICF. It is fair to say that thanks to the artist's tenacity and his ability to re-invent the entire course of his action, rather than being defeated by a temporary limitation due to a hand injury—the most common cause for pianists' unhappy career endings—Hochman was able to expand the radius and depth of his musical world.

Taking time off the bench to train as a conductor made Hochman a better musician. It also helped shape his inquisitiveness for new angles and repertoire, resulting in thoughtfully curated programs that explore music's depth beyond its core. "In a sense, I am very happy the injury forced me to open up to engage in a new direction within music," he says, "and it was definitely a combination of things." He explains, "I have always been fascinated by symphonic and operatic repertoire, and while being trained to be on the path as a pianist, this was my opportunity to redirect my focus."

After his 2006 New York debut performance at the Metropolitan Museum, and a stretch as a flourishing international presence as soloist and chamber musician, Hochman changed gears. In 2015, with the goal in mind to apply for Juilliard's conductor course, he arranged for a concert, conducting his friends and colleagues in Beethoven's 1st Symphony, which fulfilled a request of the course's application process. Under Hochman's direction, the successful encounter led to the founding of the Roosevelt Island Symphony, now in its fourth season; its loosely bonded membership consists of a large family of New York's orchestral and chamber musicians.

“There were only two pupils accepted into the prestigious Juilliard conducting program, which was led by Alan Gilbert and wonderful guest conductors, and it was a fantastic experience for me,” says Hochman. “The depth of knowledge that goes into conducting is mind-boggling. Conducting is about leadership, communication, body language, physical gesture, and a deep knowledge of the score.” Asked about wearing different hats as a pianist and a conductor he says: “Of course, music is music, in a sense. But as a pianist you deal with the instrument, yourself and the music. As a conductor you must lead others, and only a crystal-clear vision will earn you the respect you need for that.”

When we contemplate together the feared image of the authoritative conductor, directing through power trips rather than skill, we both agree, smiling, that this is probably, non-regrettably, a thing of the past. “One has to earn one’s place on the podium. I am not trying to pretend to be someone I am not. Authenticity is a quality I admire, and I believe that others do as well. The more you have to say about the music and the more eloquently you say it, your depth of experience and knowledge will radiate to the players and audience alike. I move my hands—there is no sound.

Before I ask them to play, I must sense and be able to administer each cue in this very direct line of thinking, feeling, and action,” he explains and adds: “similarly to being a soloist at the piano, there is nowhere to hide. You must sing, dream, and imagine when studying the score, but your vision must be crystal clear once you are present. The orchestra can sense very quickly if what you are asking of them is legitimate, based on that vision, or not.”

A recipient of the Bruno Walter Scholarship and Charles Schiff Award, Hochman trained under Gilbert and James Ross and was also appointed musical assistant to Louis Langrée, Thierry Fischer, Paavo Järvi, and Jeffrey Kahane during the 2016 Mostly Mozart Festival, serving as assistant conductor to Leon Botstein for American Symphony’s concerts at Carnegie Hall and Alice Tully Hall, and to Emmanuel Villaume at Juilliard. Following masterclasses with Fabio Luisi, David Zinman, and many others, he was also part of the 2018 Tanglewood Conducting Seminar.

The beauty of being part of both worlds of course translates into his busy touring schedule. Recent and forthcoming conducting engagements include Santa Fe Pro Musica, Orlando Philharmonic, and Orchestra Now, and he just returned as from a solo performance of the Schumann concerto with the Greenwich Symphony under the baton of David Gilbert.

For a new recording on the Avie record label, Hochman recently combined both of his talents, conducting Mozart’s Piano Concertos No.17 in G and No.24 in C Minor, with the English Chamber Orchestra, from the keyboard. “The stylistic insight, elegance, and sparkle of Mr. Hochman’s pianism are beautifully matched by the playing of the orchestra. The finale of the Concerto in G, structured in theme and variations form, is exceptionally inventive: each variation comes as a bit of a surprise,” comments *New York Times* critic Anthony Tommasini. Hochman points out that his collaboration with the English Chamber Orchestra has been an absolute highlight for him. The debut concerto appearance and also his first recording as a conductor contrast his wide expressive range from the most lyrical in Mozart’s Concerto No. 17 in G major, to the most dramatic and brooding in Concerto No. 24 in C minor. One may think of Barenboim’s take with the same orchestra. Playing the complete cycle of Mozart’s Piano Sonatas, the Concertos came as an organic continuation, bringing the complexity of this multi-faceted musician together.

There is something very personable about his eloquent, intelligent, and serious manner and elegant flair, which translate into artistic integrity on stage. Whether on the podium, at the keyboard in recital, or performing chamber music, Hochman sees himself mostly as a musician, deeply dedicated to the spirit of collaboration, which also becomes a decisive element in

his teaching. Once weekly, he holds a studio class as an educator on the faculty of Bard College. He feels that "it's all about communication, knowing how to get the best results and how to inspire, whether that's audiences, orchestral collaborators, or students."

Inspiration, source of discovery and crucial force between skill and aesthetic imagination, may just be the thing Hochman communicates best, making him the artist he is. Whether accumulated throughout his early upbringing, his many encounters with the best in the field, or personal experiences along the way, it has translated into his ability to conquer new things. "There is a Hebrew saying that translates into something like: 'from bitter comes sweet,'" he says. "Conquering difficult situations gives personal strength and courage to trust yourself. I am deeply grateful that my world has expanded on multiple levels, and I found ways to deepen every experience I encounter," he says. While learning new repertoire, he likes to delve into the realm of the composer, which could mean learning more about the composer's musical language, cultural, or national background; for Janáček he even studied a little bit of Czech.

Hochman's recent odyssey with Mozart's complete Piano Sonatas has made him think about undertaking a foray into another composer's cyclic work, and of course there are many contemporary works that fascinate him: "While it's exciting to premier a new piece, and there is a lot of commissioning happening at the moment, it's about new composers' integration into the syllabus. I feel that I have learned to manage a much fuller and varied schedule, going deeper and wider than I would have ever been able to handle before."

If you did not get your ticket for January 24th at 8PM yet, it is sold out ! , but there will be an add on performance at 10PM, when Hochman returns to the 92Y for an Inflection Series event, telling two mythical stories in an exciting production of Janáček's *Diary of One Who Disappeared* and Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, Op. 21 in collaboration with: Lucy Shelton, soprano; Will Ferguson, tenor; Jennifer Johnson Cano, mezzo-soprano; Kathleen O'Mara, soprano; Marie Engle, soprano; Megan Grey, mezzo soprano; Tara Helen O'Connor, flute; Romie de Guise-Langlois, clarinet; Jennifer Frautschi, violin; and Raman Ramakrishnan, cello.

Benjamin Hochman

THE JERUSALEM POST

December 18, 2019

All about Mozart

Benjamin Hochman will perform the full cycle of Mozart piano sonatas over the next 8 months.

By Barry Davis

Benjamin Hochman has a penchant for Mozart. Indeed, the US-resident, Jerusalem-born pianist is certainly not alone in that particular following. But, unlike most of us, he can put his love for the Austrian composer's oeuvre to good, creative and sonorous use.

Over the next 8 months, he will perform the full cycle of Mozart piano sonatas here, all 18 of them, plus the odd fantasia, rondo and adagio. Hochman will spread the sonata run over five dates at the Israel Conservatory of Music in Tel Aviv, with the first two concerts taking place there on December 23 and 25 (both 8:30 p.m.), featuring 8 sonatas and Fantasy in C minor. The last three performances have been set for August 2020. The current Israeli project follows the release, a couple of months ago, of recordings of Mozart's Concerto no. 17 in G major and Concerto no. 24 in C minor, together with the English Chamber Orchestra.

He has also performed with many of the world's leading ensembles, including the New York Philharmonic and the American Symphony Orchestra – the latter marked his Carnegie Hall debut – Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra and our very own Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

Hochman says the Mozart sonata initiative has been brewing for some time. "I have always felt close to the music of Mozart, and have studied and performed so much of his music over the years," he notes. "I had the idea to focus more deeply on a composer and a body of work and this felt like a natural choice for me. I feel that the beauty and depth of Mozart's music is quite unique. It approaches perfection."

He also says he was keen to offer the format in question a bit of a marketing platform. "In some way, the piano sonatas are underrated. Because they use a smaller canvas compared to, for example, the piano concertos, they require a different kind of care and focus. Some of the sonatas are very well known while others are almost never heard in concert halls. So there is a particular satisfaction for me to explore this cycle and present it to the public."

For Hochman there is more to his artistry than "just" placing his fingers on the keyboard. He says he likes to do his background research, about the person behind the quill, and draws on his accrued knowledge of the scene in general. "I am certainly interested to know as much as I can about the composer and the composer's works. When I play the Mozart sonatas, my interpretations are very much informed not only by my study, practice, and performance of those specific works, but also by my experience and knowledge of chamber music, concertos, symphonies, operas etc."

CLASSICAL MUSICIANS are not normally known for their ability to improvise on scores – even though the likes of Bach and Handel left plenty of room for maneuver in their charts – but Hochman feels there is still ample opportunity for self-expression in his line of work. "For me, the information provided in the score is of paramount importance – but it is only the starting point. To paraphrase a saying I heard once from a great musician: one of the biggest paradoxes in music is that the more you

follow the score, the more freedom you have."

While that may sound a little contradictory with classical music it is, of course, very much about the technique, spirit and personal baggage the performer brings to his or her live work. Hochman says his job is to convey the beauty of the composer's writing, in his own individual way. "The music is 100% Mozart. But when I perform it in real time, I am bringing it to life in a way which is totally unique and will never be the same, before or after."

Hochman believes there is added accumulative enjoyment and appreciation value in listening to the sonatas in a sequential manner. "I think that hearing the cycle in its entirety gives a greater awareness of the rich variety within this body of works. The effect is subtle but deep." The 39-year-old pianist also points out that, as the sonatas were created over a period of years, they also serve as reference points for various personal and artistic junctures through the composer's brief time on terra firma. "One also becomes aware of the remarkable trajectory of Mozart's creative life, from the early sonatas to the late, a fact all the more remarkable given that he only lived to be 35."

Hochman chose the order of the performances here carefully, citing various logistical, technical and continuum considerations he had to weigh up before settling on the schedule. "I wanted to share this project with the public in Israel since it has been a major artistic endeavor of mine over the last couple of years. I chose to present the cycle not in chronological order but rather in five distinct programs. Each program has a variety of works from different periods of Mozart's life. I also take into consideration the length of each sonata, as well as its key, character, form. The goal is to create a flow within each program, and generate interest for each individual program as well as the entire cycle."

Bending the format framework a mite, the pianist feels, was a given. "Including the Fantasies, Rondo, Adagio etc. is important because they provide variety of form and expression. They are also incredible, unique works that are too beautiful to exclude."

While Hochman is best known for pianistic endeavor, he also manages some baton wielding dates on occasion. "As a 20-year-old student at the Curtis Institute of Music [in Philadelphia] I took an introductory class to conducting. But my first real experience conducting was assembling a group of my friends and colleagues for a performance of Beethoven Symphony No. 1 in 2015."

SINCE THEN, he has enjoyed several conducting berths, which he feels helps to expand his artistic horizons, offers him a better understanding of the task in hand and actually influences the way he approaches his principal instrument. "I believe my experience as a conductor very much informs my piano playing. I have a broader frame of reference now, I know more music, have experienced more within music, and see and hear things from different perspectives. In the case of solo playing that might mean imagining orchestral colors within the piano writing, or uncovering parallels and associations between solo and orchestral repertoire of the same composer or period. In terms of ensemble playing, I have a better understanding of when to lead and when to follow, how to listen more closely, and how to communicate more clearly and effectively."

Hochman says that, while he does not have much in the way of professional DNA, the sounds he now appreciates as a celebrated globe-trotting practitioner were always around. He also notes that Lady Luck also had a hand in his eventual career choice. "I come from a family of music lovers rather than professional musicians. I came to classical music almost by chance at first. I was taught to play a few tunes by a woman who was looking after me when I was a child. She suggested to my parents that I take music lessons, and the rest is history... "

He has also has had the good fortune to benefit from the wisdom and professional experience of some top educators along the

way. “I have had so many powerful musical influences throughout my life and to this day. But I credit first of all my principal teachers who gave so much of themselves and have really shaped the musician that I am: [now 89-year-old Haifa-born] Esther Narkiss,
[Lithuanian-born pianist] Emanuel Krasovsky, [late German-born American pianist] Claude Frank and [American pianist] Richard Goode. In conducting, which came much later, [52-year-old American conductor and violinist] Alan Gilbert was a very important teacher for me.” Goode is best known for his interpretations of works by Mozart and Beethoven, so that must have been an inspired educator choice for Hochman.
Although Hochman has lived most of his life elsewhere he says he tries to get over here as frequently as he can, and is always delighted to entertain us with his developing keyboard skills. “I perform in Israel regularly and it is always very meaningful to me. Although I have now resided elsewhere for many years, Israel remains my home and it is important for me to maintain strong ties here.”

Benjamin Hochman

CLASSICAL POST

December 6, 2019

Benjamin Hochman, Pianist & Conductor: The Balance and the Merging of Two Arts

While the idea of balancing a steady composure of differentiating between the life of a pianist and the life of a conductor on the brink of a burgeoning career might seem overwhelming, for Benjamin Hochman, it's really quite simple.

By Hanna Marcus

"To me, music is music," he said. "Playing the piano and conducting are similar in that sense."

Benjamin Hochman, who's often referred to as Benjy, is a Jerusalem-born pianist and conductor, a beautiful combination that he's delicately balanced and merged together to create an impressive and acclaimed career. Notably, he blends eloquence with virtuous, artistic bravura with poetic interpretation—key features that don't just excite the critics, but also engage the audience, trapping them in a mesmerizing trance as he takes the stage.

All of this should come at very little surprise. His years of training, studying, performing, and perfecting his craft are many—each and every one of them filled with dedication, impassioned persistence, and a love for the most important thing of all, the music.

Hochman first began his piano studies with Esther Narkiss at the Conservatory of the Rubin Academy and with Emanuel Krasovsky in Tel Aviv. Further, he's a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music (where he studied with Claude Frank) as well as the Mannes College of Music (where he studied with Richard Goode). As a soloist, Hochman has performed in major venues spanning the globe, including (but certainly not limited to) Carnegie Hall, Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, Suntory Hall in Tokyo, Kumho Art Hall in Seul, Tivoli Theatre in Copenhagen, List Academy in Budapest, Louvre in Paris, and many more.

His passion for conducting, though, didn't start quite as early on in his classical music pianist career, but his admiration for the rich orchestral repertoire led him to pursue conducting—a passion that's become an integral staple in his classical music career. In 2016, he was appointed musical assistant to Louis Langrée, as well as to guest conductors at the 2016 Mostly Mozart Festival (including Thierry Fischer, Jeffrey Kahane, and Paavo Järvi).

As complex and demanding as both arts must be, for Hochman, the two passions seem to feed into each other, strengthening each side of the coin despite the very different skill sets needed to be successful in both roles.

"(Both) are about communicating the essence of the music truthfully and deeply," Hochman said. "That said, there are very different skill sets required. To paraphrase my teacher, Alan Gilbert, conducting has many areas. Meaning, there are so many different kinds of knowledge and skills needed to conduct."

Still, despite the differences, Hochman feels a deep connection between the two, remarking the challenges of balancing both and the pressure of understanding the intricacies of each could never outweigh the rich rewards of his dual profession.

"For me, conducting feels like a natural continuation, extension, and outgrowth of my life as a pianist. I love both the challenges and rewards of conducting. The biggest challenge is the responsibility towards the musicians, audiences, and of course, the music itself. The rewards are the richness of the repertoire, the thrill of the sound of the orchestra, and the joy of working with a large group that, when things go well, play as one."

Hochman's most recent foray into this natural continuation is his recently released recording with the English Chamber Orchestra, released by Avie Records. It features two of Mozart's piano concertos—the joyful and lyrical No. 17 in G major and the dark, dramatic No. 24 in C minor—marking not only the first concerto recording of Hochman, but also his debut appearance as conductor.

The sharp juxtaposition of the two piano concertos in Hochman's recording was no accident—he designed this recording and motivated his music selection on the idea of sunshine and darkness.

"(That choice) was a combination of things," Hochman said. "This recording emerged as part of my immersion in Mozart's music. Specifically, I am currently playing the complete Mozart piano sonatas, and the recording of the Concertos No. 17 & 24 came as a continuation of that. It was my first recording as a concerto soloist and also my first as conductor—so it brought together these two sides of my musical activity in a natural way."

For Hochman, the joy of this recording was embedded in not just his dual roles, but also in the orchestral accompaniment that completed the richness of his vision.

"The English Chamber Orchestra was a joy to work with," Hochman said. "They have this music in their DNA."

Though Hochman's dedication for his pianist-conductor career—which has earned him a vibrant, international music

presence—is encompassing, it should come as no surprise that his duality isn't the limit of his identity. Hochman is an enthusiastic collaborator, a dedicated advocate for contemporary music, and an inspiring mentor.

His current list of projects are, for lack of a better descriptor, pretty lengthy. What exactly is he working on, you ask?

"So much!" he said. "The Mozart Sonata Cycle. An interesting recital of Bach Toccatas interspersed with Frescobaldi, Ligeti, Busoni, and Berio. I just did Prokofiev 3rd Concerto, next up Schumann Concerto and two Mozart Concertos (12 and 14). A pairing I am excited about—Pierrot Lunaire and Janacek "Diary of One Who Vanished." And lots of great chamber music: a Schubertiade including Harbison, a Faure Quartet and Franck Quintet, violin sonatas by Bartok and Enescu, and conducting Gubaidulina, Vivier, Schumann Schubert and Beethoven."

Benjamin Hochman

CLASSICAL POST

February 28, 2019

Israeli Pianist Benjamin Hochman Immerses In Mozart After Sabbatical

For the past three years, Israeli pianist Benjamin Hochman suffered from a hand injury that pulled him away from extensive tours and concert engagements. Now that sabbatical is over.

Winner of the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant in 2011, Benjamin is offering his Complete All-Mozart Sonata Project over the course of two seasons (2018-2019 and 2019-2020). He will perform five concerts at the Bard College Conservatory of Music from October 2018 to September 2019 and the Israel Conservatory in Tel Aviv in September 2019. Part of this Mozart immersion includes 18 sonatas and 4 irresistible shorter pieces.

He also will record the Mozart Piano Concertos No. 17 and 24 with the English Chamber Orchestra in London in April 2019, set to be released on Avie Records in fall 2019.

"The inspiration for my Mozart immersion comes from my admiration for his music," Benjamin said. "He expresses every human emotion, and the depth, subtlety and beauty in his art are qualities I care about. I am reading a wonderful history book that summarized the Ancient Greeks' outlook on life as prizing beauty and truth above all else. This describes Mozart's music perfectly."

Other projects and performances

As if this immersion isn't enough, Benjamin has many other performances and works in the mix.

February 17 marked his first NYC concert since his sabbatical, where he joined the New York Philharmonic as a guest artist for an enchanting chamber music concert at the Merkin Hall where he performed Faure Piano Quartet No. 2. In the past year, he gave world premieres by Jesse Brault, Gilad Cohen and Max Grafe in November 2018, as well as performed at Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, Goucher College and Strings Music Festival in Steamboat Springs.

He returns to center stage this season with Bartok's Piano Concerto No. 3 with the Whatcom Symphony in Bellingham, Washington, in May; and Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 12 in A major, K. 414 with Santa Fe Pro Musica and the Orlando Philharmonic.

Happiness and the Stage

Benjamin derives happiness from family and friends, yoga, running, and a plate of perfectly prepared pasta with freshly shaved black truffles. He finds inspiration through his encounters with all the arts: reading, attending plays, going to museums, and galleries, as well as being in nature. "I believe that everything we experience as human beings shapes our art. I also think that we have greater inner resources than we realize, and just as in life so in art, there is always more to discover," Benjamin said.

Benjamin Hochman

THOUGHT CATALOG

March 12, 2015

Music For Writers: Benjamin Hochman, Translator — And 'A Bit Of A Shaman, Too'

By Porter Anderson

'At The Piano...Even Dreams'

The very first notes of the album arrive like an abrupt, sonic question mark: "What can we do with this little perplexed phrase?"

The burly Scottish composer Oliver Knussen certainly knew what to do with his exquisitely moody 1989 *Variations* on just six notes.

And happily, it's Israeli-born pianist Benjamin Hochman at the keyboard. You find few artists whose touch could be more sensitive and yet assertive in this clever opening of his new album *Variations* from Avie Records.

Thanks to New York Public Radio's contemporary classical stream Q2 Music, you can hit the player above and listen to the full CD free of charge during its Album of the Week run.

Pianist Hochman has created his entire album around variations — one, the Brahms at the end, comes from the late classical era, while the others are from our time, our tensions, our tonalities. It's a gratifying concept for a CD that leaves you admiring Hochman for the range of interpretive intelligence he brings to five very different composers' creative voices.

And that's where I began our interview.

'The Brahms is the work I have lived with the longest'

Thought Catalog: Let me start by asking whether your own interpretive voice is naturally closer to one or another of the

idioms represented here? The distance from Brahms to Berio, alone, is no short haul, and your capability in each of these stylistic constructs makes me wonder if there's one composer with whom you might feel most comfortable?

Benjamin Hochman

Benjamin Hochman: In this album, I wanted to group together some beautiful piano works that happen to be in variation form. The innate versatility of the form has proven to be a natural draw for composers of all eras, and in the last century or so in particular, composers of greatly contrasting styles have used this form as a canvas for their distinctive musical ideas.

What I loved about preparing, performing and recording this project was both the cohesiveness of the concept and the freedom provided by each composer's individual idiom.

My relationship with each composer and work on this recording has its own story and trajectory. Each encounter with the music creates impressions that eventually build an interpretation: practice sessions, performances, time spent thinking about the music at the piano and away from it, even dreams.

The Brahms is the work I have lived with the longest: I learned it as a teenager and performed it in my very first concert in America, as a student at the Curtis Institute of Music. I love Brahms' music and have played quite a lot of it: his Händel *Variations* are a true masterpiece that I enjoy coming back to time and again.

With the three living composers represented here, my experience meeting them personally was very meaningful.

TC: You've met Knussen?

BH: I attended a rehearsal of Oliver Knussen conducting the Curtis Symphony and was immediately impressed by his incisive, clear and commanding approach to music. This led me to explore his oeuvre and eventually to his *Piano Variations*. The combination of tightly coiled energy, playfulness and colorful use of the piano is very appealing to me.

TC: And George Benjamin?

BH: When I was a student at the Marlboro Music Festival in 2001, George Benjamin was composer-in-residence: he conducted his own music and even improvised late one evening on the piano to provide music for a silent movie. His refined, sophisticated music speaks to me very much. *Meditation on Haydn's Name* is beautiful, gentle and flowing, with an improvisatory flair.

TC: And Peter Lieberson.

BH: That same summer at Marlboro, I heard an unforgettable and revelatory performance given by the great singer Lorraine Hunt Lieberson and the wonderful pianist Peter Serkin. The program included Peter Lieberson's *Rilke Songs*, which I absolutely loved. I got to know more of his music and liked it so much that after receiving the Avery Fisher Career Grant [in 2011], I asked him to write a piano concerto for me. Unfortunately, he was very ill, and did not live to write the piece. I did have the pleasure of spending an afternoon with him and his wife Rinchen in Tel Aviv, where he was receiving experimental treatment at a hospital: I really enjoyed spending this brief time with him.

I have played a few of his works, and when I learned that his *Piano Variations* – written in 1996 for the fantastic pianist Emanuel Ax and premiered at Lincoln Center — had never been recorded, I felt compelled to do it myself. Lieberson's *Variations* are perhaps the most immediately accessible on first hearing of the contemporary works on this recording, without sacrificing depth and sophistication. The synthesis of disparate musical styles — jazz and popular music, folk materials, a crunchy and acerbic modernist harmonic language, a vivid imagination, and the Buddhist concepts embedded in this piece — make it richly satisfying.

TC: How about Luciano Berio?

BH: I never met Berio [who died in 2003] but have always loved his music, which is both brilliant and deeply human. His *Cinque Variazioni* is an early work and the oldest of the contemporary pieces on this recording. It was composed in 1953 and revised in 1966. It's so atmospheric and full of character: alternately funny, furious and visionary.

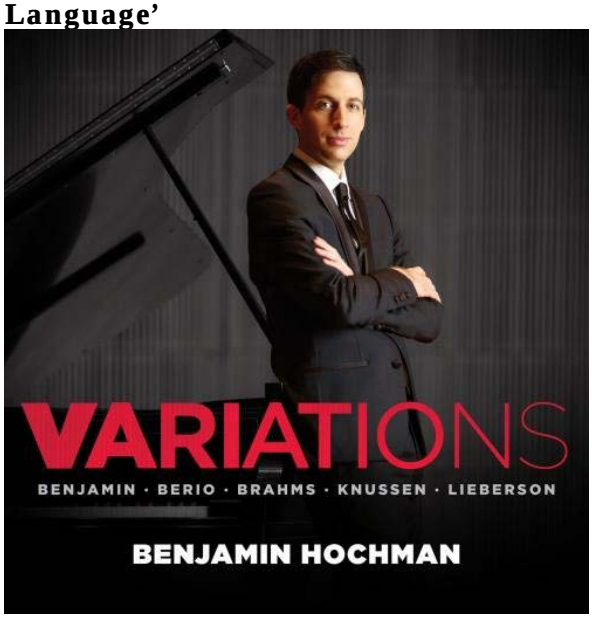
'The Lieberson can be quite gnarly'

TC: Is there one of these composers whose work is especially challenging among the group?

BH: I think they all are very challenging! The Brahms is a challenge because it's by far the largest of these pieces, a massive edifice where each brick in the structure is crucial. The Berio and Knussen are extremely challenging both technically and conceptually- it really took me a long time to master the difficulty of physically playing them as well as fully understanding them to the point that I could be free to express myself and communicate that to an audience.

The Lieberson can be quite gnarly at times and has a particular approach to the instrument that was not immediately natural to me. The Benjamin was challenging because despite the impression of ease that the listener receives, the score is notated meticulously and each note must not be moved one millimeter in either direction — a sort of sleight of hand is needed to make it work.

'I Try To Immerse Myself In Each Language'



TM: Would it be too far afield of me to suggest that hearing you handle these different composers so deftly is like hearing a good translator at work? Is there a kind of "language" to each of them, in terms of how you approach working with such different pieces?

BH: I like this idea very much. Since I am a performer rather than a composer, I feel that my role is indeed akin to a translator, though sometimes a bit of a shaman too: my goal is to bring the piece back to life, using the information in the score as a blueprint. I agree that each composer has a distinct language — even if a group of composers within a particular time period share a common group of languages — and sometimes certain pieces within a composer's oeuvre speak a particular dialect within that language.

I try to immerse myself in each language until I understand its syntax, sound and spirit. My hope is to make it clear, comprehensible and meaningful to my listeners.

TC: I'm listening to the sprightly sounds in the latter part of the Lieberson variations, and then the meditative tone — as the title has it! — of the Benjamin work on Haydn's name. You know, the comparison raises an interesting question relative to our "Music for Writers" series. In text, our authors are often surprised to find that "quieter," more cerebral or less active scenes and plot points can be more draining to handle than energetic, busy passages. Is there any corollary in your experience of this kind of music? — can the restraint and concentration required by some of the "Haydn" be as or more taxing, in performance than, say, the walking bass of the latter part of the Knussen with the upper hand all over the place?

BH: I think so, especially in terms of mental concentration rather than physical exertion. I find that every sound has a distinct color and character. People sometimes think that loud and frenetic passages are much more intense than soft spacious ones, and this can true. But the opposite can also be true: some of the most frightening, shattering moments in music are given *sotto voce*.

Of the pieces on this recording, I found these kinds of passages in the Berio especially: both the opening and the closing sections are deeply mysterious, intense and expressive, akin to Beethoven's late style where every note speaks volumes. It takes tremendous concentration and control to succeed in these passages.

TC: In terms of your discernment of the subtleties of each of these composers' variations, is this a way of hearing music that has been with you from boyhood? Were you always so comfortable with this type of diversity? It's not every musician's *forte*, as we know. Or is this range of response something you've developed later in life as your work matured?

BH: I think I was always interested in music that spoke to me directly and deeply, regardless of a particular style or period. I do feel that my approach to programming, both in concert and on recordings, has evolved and become more specific, though without any particular dogma or agenda. I like to juxtapose pieces that speak to each other, compliment or contrast each other. I think that this is one way to keep music alive and well, nether rejecting music of earlier times because of the weight of tradition and performance practice, nor rejecting the new out of fear or lack of familiarity.

Most importantly, my hope is always to give my listeners thought-provoking, moving experiences.

'Bob Dylan or Pete Seeger'

TC: Lastly, I'd love to know if you come from a musical family? Was there music in your home in Jerusalem? Or did you catch everyone by surprise with this talent and affinity for the art?

BH: I come from a family of music lovers, though not at all professional musicians or even in the direction of classical music. If there was music playing in the house it was likely to be Bob Dylan or Pete Seeger.

My parents are literature professors. My father's research interests include D. H. Lawrence, Charles Dickens, and S. Y. Agnon. My mother's research includes book history and nineteenth-century American literature and culture. And my brother is a mathematician: his research is in dynamical system theory and connections with fractal geometry, information theory and computation theory.

So my interest in music came about really by chance, through a music teacher who discovered my affinity for music early on. My family has always been very supportive, each of them discovering and rediscovering music in new ways through the years — it's been fun to watch that. Their perspectives and opinions are often very refreshing!

TC: And what's coming up for you next?

BH: Many exciting projects coming up: Rzewski's *People United Will Never Be Defeated!*; an "Homage to Chopin" recital program including new works by Kaija Saariaho, Tamar Muskal and Thomas Ades; concertos by Mozart, Bernstein, Ravel and De Falla; myriad chamber music collaborations; and plans for some significant cycles of solo piano works focusing on major composers.

TC: So busy! And literary parents. I should have known. It's great of you to take the time to talk to us. This is such "writerly" music, full of color and nuance that can help stimulate the vocabulary of any good author at work, so it's doubly nice to be able to offer it to our readers. Congratulations again on a very compelling collection here.

BH: Thank you so much. This has been really fun and your questions have been fascinating and thought provoking. I feel that you really took the time to think about my project and you understood so much about it — that means a lot to me.

Benjamin Hochman

MUSICALAMERICA.COM

March 15, 2011

Avery Fisher Career Grants Announced

By Nicholas Beard

Three young artists were awarded Avery Fisher Career Grants yesterday at a private recital/reception in the Kaplan Penthouse at Lincoln Center. Each receives $25,000 toward career development, as well as a DVD of their respective performances.

This year's winners are violinist Caroline Goulding, 19, MusicalAmerica.com Dec. 2009 New Artist of the Month; 30-year-old pianist Benjamin Hochman; and pianist Chu-Fang Huang, 28.

That brings to 121 the total number of recipients of grant recipients since they were first established in 1976. They are funded with a gift from their late namesake to Lincoln Center in 1974. Individuals are nominated by a national panel; making the final choices of up to five artists is the executive committee, chaired by Nathan Leventhal. Other members include Emanuel Ax, pianist; David Finckel and Wu Han, artistic directors, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center; Henry Fogel, dean, Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University; Anthony Fogg, artistic administrator, Boston Symphony Orchestra; Pamela Frank, violinist; Ara Guzelimian, provost and dean, The Juilliard School; Reynold Levy, president, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts; Yo-Yo Ma, cellist; Zarin Mehta, president, New York Philharmonic; Jane S. Moss, Vice President, Programming, Lincoln Center; Joseph W. Polisi, president, The Juilliard School; Chad Smith, vice president, artistic programming, Los Angeles Philharmonic; and Mathas Tarnopolsky, director, Cal Performances, UC Berkeley.

Charles Avery Fisher and Nancy Fisher serve as advisors to the committee. They presented the awards, together with Leventhal, who is also a former Lincoln Center president.

Benjamin Hochman

November 7, 2011

Avery Fisher Career Grant Winner: Benjamin Hochman

(click to play or visit http://bit.ly/sp9KNc)

Since 1976, more than 121 talented young musicians have been recognized with the Avery Fisher Career Grant Awards. These Grants of $25,000 give professional assistance and recognition to talented instrumentalists who the Recommendation Board and Executive Committee believe have great potential for solo careers. At the announcement in March at the Kaplan Penthouse in Lincoln Center, this year's three recipients played for their honored guests. In this SundayArts Profile, we are treated to an excerpt from Chopin's Polonaise Fantasy, Opus 61, performed by Avery Fisher Career Grant winner Benjamin Hochman. The talented artist has appeared with the New York Philharmonic and the Israel Philharmonic as well as the Chicago, Cincinnati, New Jersey and Pittsburgh Symphonies.

Benjamin Hochman

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

June 23, 2011

Pianist fulfilled with old and new

Hochman inspired by music of today and of the past

By Colin Eatock

Israeli-born pianist Benjamin Hochman first appeared in Houston a couple of years ago. In 2009 he stepped in on short notice to play Bach's *Goldberg Variations* in the Houston Symphony's Bach vs. Vivaldi Festival at Houston Baptist University's Belin Chapel and Recital Hall.

Friday, the 31-year-old musician who calls New York home returns to Houston to play Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 23* with the Houston Symphony during a free concert at the Miller Theatre.

Of late, Hochman has been making a name for himself through appearances with the orchestras of Chicago, San Francisco, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati and Seattle, among others — and with performances in Israel. The New York Times has praised his "fluidity and resiliency" at the keyboard.

In March, his star rose higher when it was announced that he'd won a prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant from New York's Lincoln Center, worth $25,000. He talks about his plans for the award and what motivates him as a musician.

Q: How did you win an Avery Fisher Career Grant?

A: I'm not quite sure! It's the kind of award where you're nominated by a committee of very distinguished artists. I didn't know anything about it until I got a call telling me I'd won the grant. Of course, I was absolutely thrilled.

Q: According to Lincoln Center, the award is for "specific needs" in furthering your career. So what will you do with the money?

A: I'm planning to commission a new piano concerto. It's in the latter stages of the decision-making process, and I'll be able to say more about it soon. What I can say is that it will probably be from a European composer, but it's likely that the premiere will be in the United States.

I feel that working with today's composers is tremendously satisfying and important. I love playing Mozart and Beethoven and all the great composers — but there's something vital about commissioning music from people who are writing today. And there are so many interesting voices of composers these days. And I think there's something especially exciting about juxtaposing the music of today with the music of the past.

Q: Your repertoire seems to be wide-ranging - solo repertoire, chamber music and concertos.

And your first CD spanned 200 years, from J.S. Bach to Alban Berg. Do you ever feel the desire to specialize more?

A: The modern world has a tendency to want to pigeonhole artists. I tend to resist that trend because there are so many works of quality, and composers of quality, in all eras. It's very revealing to see the similarities and differences of works by composers of different periods. However, there are some composers who are so great and inspiring that I hope to focus more on their work — composers like Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert and Schumann.

Q: Looking back on your career so far, what performances stand out as particularly memorable?

A: I would have to say my first performance in Isaac Stern Auditorium at Carnegie Hall, when I played with the Israel Philharmonic, in 2004. Working with the greatest orchestra from my home country — and my first performance in one of the greatest halls in the world — was very meaningful. I'd also mention my debut recital in New York at the Metropolitan Museum, which was an important engagement as well.

Q: There are thousands of concert pianists in the world today. What does a pianist have to do to stand out?

A: Personally, I feel that although the competition is intense, the most important thing is to deepen my own art — to communicate what I have to say to audiences. In the 21st century many people are looking to find ways to grab the attention of the public. But in the end, what people are looking for is the moment when something really special happens that goes beyond words — which is why we have music in the first place.

Q: What makes a concert special for you?

A: It has to do with the music I'm playing, and the chemistry between myself and the other performers. And sometimes it has to do with the hall and the audience. These are all factors that have the potential to make a great performance. You never know when it will happen, but you always strive for it.

Q: What's the hardest thing about being a concert pianist today?

A: Being on planes so much! I say that half in jest — but it can be very challenging to maintain the freshness of performances when you're playing in different countries from one day to the next. I think keeping the inspiration the devotion to the art is the most important thing.

Q: And what's the most rewarding part of the job?

A: The most rewarding thing is to be able to share great music with others.

Q: There's some concern in the world today that younger people aren't much interested in classical music. When you look around at young people, how worried do you think we should be?

A: It's a legitimate concern, given that there are so many problems with orchestras and other arts organizations these days. But I have to say that I'm optimistic. Maybe that's just my nature.

Historically, people have tended to come to classical music later in life. But it's always great to see young people at concerts. And I think some young people just need a chance to get hooked on classical music — the right music, the right setting and the right artists.

The one thing I'm worried about is arts education. I'm concerned about the fact that not enough young people are exposed to art in general, and music specifically. That's something that everyone should be worried about.

Benjamin Hochman

July 8, 2010

SFist Interviews: SF Symphony Assistant Conductor Donato Cabrera

Donato Cabrera is currently the Assistant conductor of the SF Symphony, and the music director of the SF Symphony Youth orchestra. But this month, his main job will be to conduct a good chunk of the summer series concerts, starting tonight with a concert titled My Classic American Composers. He won't be conducting the intriguing Final Fantasy video game soundtrack concerts, but will lead the orchestra in a live accompaniment of Bernard Herrman score for Hitchcock's movie Psycho, and for more "classic" nights: an all-Beethoven fest and a wall-to-wall Tchaikovsky evening.

Despite his exotic name (Donato sounds like he could be a mutant ninja turtle), he's an up-and-coming American conductor, born in 1973 in Los Angeles and raised in the biggest little city of the world, Reno. His musical career seem to orbit around the bay area, where he was previously assistant conductor of the SF Opera under Donald Runnicles. Check out this opera pit cam of Donato in action. He's a voluble and engaging speaker who started to answer our questions before we could finish them: he sure looked quite excited about his summer gigs.

The pieces you'll play are such classic, and the SF Symphony is such an excellent orchestra, can't they play them on their own?

Donato: In many ways, they could do it almost on their own. What is wonderful is the relationship I have been able to develop with them over this last year. There are people in this orchestra that have played Beethoven's Pastoral symphony numerous times. Hopefully I'll be doing something different with this piece and we're all excited to play it again.

How can you do something different with such well known pieces?

Donato: I think a lot of it has to do with my personal growth as an artist. I'm a younger conductor who will be doing these pieces for, if not the first time, for the second time. And when you're still exploring these pieces as a younger artist, that in and of itself brings a fresh sound, well hopefully it should, of that discovery. That's what I'm excited about. During rehearsals, I'll be coming with

fresh eyes, where I am in my life as an artist, and that combination of meeting such experienced musicians in the symphony, that creates an interpretation that is unique and new.

In your Classic Beethoven concert, you'll be playing the Emperor concerto, and Yuja Wang said in an interview it was boring, "it's just a lot of scales and arpeggios."

Donato: We all are in different points in our lives, and who's to say that twenty years from now Yuja might take a look at the Emperor concerto again and say something totally different.

She has her perspective, she has her opinion, that's wonderful, it's her own take and I completely respect that. I'm excited, because it's going to be the first time I conduct the concerto, and I happen to know the soloist, Ben Hochman. I saw him give a private recital here in San Francisco about six month ago. I was very impressed and we met and talked afterward. We both knew we'd be working together at that point on this piece. For me, the Emperor concerto is one of these pieces I grew up listening to when I was discovering classical music for the first time, so it has a special place in my heart.

You are leading the SF Symphony Youth Orchestra, and we haven't seen the program for the next season.

Donato: As of yesterday, we just finalized the program...

And you haven't sent it to us yet?

Donato: [laughs] I'm sorry, I sent it to MTT and I talked with him. Most of the people at the symphony don't know about it yet.

So you have to get MTT and the symphony's stamp of approval on the SFSYO season program?

Donato: Yes, which I love, because he has so much knowledge about the repertoire. We talk about it during a break or after the rehearsal is over. We met over the last two or three weeks, we've been throwing ideas back and forth about the program. I would come up with something, and he would say, that's a great idea, but what about this other piece that he's composed? I would say, that's great, let me go home, look at the score or listen to a recording. We really worked together to create new programs that I think will be very exciting. Of course, the next season is very special, because it will be the 30th anniversary season, we have a very exciting program for the final concert in May. I wish I could tell you, but I should wait.

Looking back at your first year with the SFSYO, was it what you expected?

Donato: It's all I expected and more. I've known this orchestra since I was in school, it's one of the most famous youth orchestras in the world, it has a very important history. It has always been known to have incredibly talented players, and to sound like a professional orchestra, in fact to sound better than a lot of professional orchestras. So I knew what I was getting into with the level of execution. What I didn't know was how wonderfully dedicated every kid is in the orchestra, everyone gives 110%. Every kid is doing fifteen different things, and doing them all well. This is only one outlet for their creativity. We meet every Saturday, they are all lined up doing their calculus homework or whatever it is, and they put that away and pull out their instrument. We work hard for four hours every Saturday, and they're on to their next activity. I am just amazed at their energy, and their commitment, and their communication. They have a lot of energy and they are all so eager in taking part in the process of creating these masterpieces.

I very much encourage them to have their own voice. Because, as a young artist, that can often be a challenge to truly learn to express yourself not just with the instrument, but to talk about it, to have an opinion. I will ask the first flute, what do you think about the first

part of the solo here? I do encourage that, it's very important, and it's been very rewarding.

Are you pinned down by this job, are you doing less guest conducting and covering?

Donato: Not really. It is a big commitment. Last season, I covered 12 weeks of the subscription series, almost all of MTT's weeks. And there were two instances where I had to go on and sub for him.

Actually it happened the first week, for the opening gala, not the Opening Night, but two nights after that, when we were down at the Flint center. I had to conduct the second half of the concert, Prokofiev piano concerto No. 3 with no rehearsal. MTT was not feeling well, and he was able to make it through the first half, but right after intermission began, he told me: you're up.

I did do a couple guest conducting jobs last year, I went and filled in with two weeks notice with the St Paul chamber orchestra, in St Paul, Minnesota, that was really a great experience. And in October, I went to Chile, I work with an orchestra there every year, and I'll be doing similar thing during the upcoming season. So while I have a big commitment with the Youth Orchestra, which I'm very happy with, it is encouraged and allowed that I seek other opportunities as well.

You worked at SF Opera under then-music director Donald Runnicles, who just came back in town. Is he much a mentor?

Donato: He left [last week], the final performance of Walküre was on Wednesday night and he left on Thursday to go to Grand Teton Music Festival. He's very much a mentor. That's one thing I feel very lucky, I have had wonderful mentors: MTT, Donald Runnicles, James Conlon being three of my most important mentors. Working with Donald for three years was very wonderful, because most young American conductors never have the opportunity to work in an opera house, which is very typical for young European conductors. And when you're a young conductor in an opera house, you are conducting six days a week, six hours a day. There are hours and hours of staging rehearsal, it's impossible for one conductor to do all of that, so assistant conductors are very much utilized in an opera house.

The opera orchestra is doing the staging rehearsals?

Donato: No, no, no. The staging rehearsal, it's with a pianist and with all the singers. The pianist's job is to respond the way the orchestra would respond to you, they're trained to do that and it's actually a remarkable thing to see, these rehearsal pianists are so gifted. You learn so much as a young conductor by working with them. Chances are, for three hours, you'll be working on just one scene, maybe on just one hundred measures of music over and over again. It's a wonderful opportunity to approach these one hundred measures slightly different each time. You don't have that luxury with the symphony orchestra. You usually have just four rehearsals, and then the concert begins. It's invaluable for the young conductor to have opera experience.

You have covered all these famous conductors. How are they different in the approach to a performance?

Donato: I think the one thing that is very important that I've learned by seeing not just these three, but many great conductors, is to be yourself, is to really be comfortable with who you are, and to go with that. Not try to please others or be something you're not. All these great conductors are so comfortable in their skin.

They all have this internal digital clock in their brain, they always know exactly how much time there is left in the rehearsal, how much they can achieve

and what to work on. I can always tell, if they start at a specific point in the music, they know that from that point to the end of the piece will take them exactly to the end of the rehearsal, so they all have amazing time management skills.

They all contain both an incredibly relaxed approach while being demanding at the same time. They know what they want, but they're not going to create any negative energy.

So, the only difference in the approach seems to be in their personality?

Donato: That's how I look at it: it's a given they are great musicians, that's the basis, that's the prerequisite. All of them are great musicians, so what they bring to the table, that's their own take on what they have discovered in studying that piece of music. So, the way they deliver that information is entirely dependent upon their personality.

From your point of view, you have your own personality, what can you learn from it?

Donato: When I see MTT or Donald Runnicles rehearse, they're often conducting a piece they have done many many times, and they will often rehearse it in a way I had not thought of. After rehearsal, I would ask them: why did you rehearse this over and over again. And they're like: having done this piece fifty times, I know that this corner, or that transition is always very tricky. It may not look like that on the page, and it may not have seemed that way to you when you studied it, but believe me, it will be. You can never know that on your own. It's their experience with the pieces, having done them so many times that I feel lucky experiencing in rehearsal and seeing it happen.

The other thing too, with MTT, he had such close relationship with so many famous composers, Stravinsky, Copland, Bernstein, and he's a fantastic story teller. So hearing him recount his many encounters with composers, he mimics their voices, it's really great fun.

Your predecessors, Edwin Outwater, Benjamin Shwartz, James Gaffigan, have moved on. Do you intend to follow in their footsteps?

Donato: Definitely. But if you were to ask them what that next step would have been when they were here, they would not have known. I would love to have the opportunity to work in Europe. Benjamin is living in Berlin, guest conducting here and there in Europe. Edwin is music director of the Kitchener-Waterloo symphony in Canada, but lives in Chicago, and James just became music director of Lucerne Symphony. Historically this position has been a stepping stone to something bigger and better. And becoming music director of your own orchestra, that's certainly one of my goals. As to when and to what, I have no idea. I have two more seasons with the SFSYO, I still have some time to figure what to do.

Benjamin Hochman

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

May 28, 2008

Rising star pianist takes novel approach to music

By Andrew Druckenbrod
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The enduring archetype of the musical prodigy who quickly outpaces his teachers finds little root in Benjamin Hochman's story. But that's not because the 28-year-old pianist isn't talented. In fact, he is already solidly into an international concert career. No, it's because the Jerusalem-born soloist didn't have typical teachers. For the most part, his mentors have been among the world's musical titans.

Hochman studied at the Curtis Institute of Music with the distinguished pianist Claude Frank, then worked with the formidable Richard Goode in New York. In between, he can count Mitsuko Uchida and Jaime Laredo as mentors, and even a string player, Pinchas Zukerman lauds his playing. In fact, it's because of that latter relationship that Hochman is debuting with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

"Having teachers who are also performers and have been through so many things in their careers is so helpful," says Hochman from his apartment in Manhattan. "Sometimes just having a sounding board to talk to people about what makes sense in terms of career decisions is helpful."

Occasionally, he gets even more than advice. Uchida, who heard Hochman at the Marlboro Music Festival, recommended him to conductor Zubin Mehta, resulting in an engagement with the Israel Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall in December 2004. Zukerman invited the pianist to play with the Zukerman ChamberPlayers in 2006.

Hochman was born to American parents living in Israel. Both are professors of English literature, but "for me the love of music has been the driving force," he says. "It is very consuming and it is always present."

Case in point is his iPod, which is full of Mozart, even if it is hard to hear sometimes when he walks around New York. "I go to the subway and I put Mozart on, but [the subway] can be loud," he says with a laugh.

Mozart has been central to his connection with his well-known teachers and his career. "For me a lot of it comes from recognizing my passion for certain composers. There are certain composers that I feel especially close to," says Hochman. Mozart is certainly one, and Hochman will solo in Piano Concerto No. 17 in G major this weekend.

It is not just because Hochman started playing piano at 6 and gave his first recital at 11 that he has an affinity for the famed prodigy Mozart. It's partially because Hochman finds in Mozart many of the same qualities his parents find in great novels: "[It's] finding different characters," he says.

"One of the amazing things with Mozart is how he can in one phrase carry so many different human emotions. As a pianist, one of the challenges is really to give the sense of a human voice and convey that emotion."

For Mozart, the inspiration was not literature but opera. He was obsessed with the stage and his instrumental works are often saturated with the vocal idiom.

Benjamin Hochman — *Feels especially close to Mozart's works.*

"With Mozart piano concertos there is such a similarity to the world of opera," says Hochman. "Especially in [Concerto No. 17], I hear so many different opera scenes. The slow movement is really like a grand aria, with so many different moods. In the outer movements there is a vivacity — a very bubbly, sparkling, lovely Mozart. I hear a lot of 'Figaro' and 'Magic Flute' and I try to bring that out."

Poetic thinking like this shows an artist thinking beyond the notes, advice he surely received from his mentors. Hochman has had the best of starts; how his career progresses is up to him.

Benjamin Hochman

The New York Times

March 11, 2014

The Intrepid Explorer, Leaping From Lush to Spiky

Benjamin Hochman's Deep Dive Into Contemporary Work

By Anthony Tommasini

Benjamin Hochman The pianist played contemporary theme-and-variation pieces on Monday at SubCulture.

A recital by a thoughtful young pianist in a basement performance space that seats about 150 people may not seem particularly significant. Yet on Monday night at SubCulture, as I listened to the pianist Benjamin Hochman's sensitive, exciting renditions of four contemporary works that explore the form of theme and variation (including one premiere), I kept thinking that classical music doesn't get better than this.

Here was a brilliant, self-effacing 33-year-old artist who simply wanted to share his enthusiasm for some formidable sets of variations in an ideally intimate setting, ending with the composer Frederic Rzewski's epic, nearly hourlong 36 variations on a popular Chilean resistance song, "The People United Will Never Be Defeated," written in 1975. The recital was part of a 92nd Street Y series at SubCulture, the new mini-concert-hall and bar under the Lynn Redgrave Theater in the East Village.

Mr. Hochman has always shown natural curiosity about old and new music. Last fall the Avie label released his solo recording titled "Homage to Schubert," with elegant,

impressive accounts of two Schubert sonatas, along with two contemporary works in tribute to that composer by Jörg Widmann and Gyorgy Kurtag.

Mr. Hochman spoke to his audience on Monday about each piece on the program and about the genre of theme and variations, an exercise in exploration where a theme, sometimes a simple one, is investigated for all its possibilities. He opened with Oliver Knussen's Variations (1989). The theme is just an elemental statement of a few emphatic notes.

The variations, however, unfold in music of constantly shifting moods, character and intensity. At times, the music is plush with crystalline colorings and melting harmonies, which Mr. Hochman played gorgeously. Then the work bursts into fidgety stretches of keyboard-spanning lines, like a pointillist toccata.

Before playing the next work, Berio's "Cinque Variazione" (1952-53), Mr. Hochman suggested to audience members that instead of trying to follow the individual variations, they listen to the overall flow and sweep of this piece. And in his rhapsodic performance, this ingenious, complex modernist score indeed sounded like a fantasy.

The first half ended with the premiere of "Frédéric Variations," by the composer Tamar Muskal, who wrote the piece for Mr. Hochman. The title refers to Chopin. Ms. Muskal took as a theme his Étude No. 2 from "Trois Nouvelles Études," a lilting, hazy work. In Ms. Muskal's variations, that étude soon becomes fractured and frenzied, setting off a long, expansive, sometimes fitful exploration, with pummeling rhythms, spiky chords and onrushing riffs.

The Rzewski work, which, as Mr. Hochman writes, has become "something of a cult hit," begins with the protest song stated in thumping octaves, then turns into a kind of swinging, mellow jazzy dance. From then on, for nearly an hour, the tune is transfigured into variations based on milky arpeggios, staggered chord bursts, twisting strands of clashing counterpoint, hints of Rachmaninoff and Bach swathed in a modernist haze, what could be a Scottish air and more. The inventiveness of the piece is staggering. So is its difficulty, though you would not have guessed this from Mr. Hochman's commanding performance.

Benjamin Hochman

The Millbrook Independent

June 3, 2024

Beethoven's Legacy at Music Mountain

By Kevin T McEneaney

In Falls Village, CT, Music Mountain's Season Opening Benefit Concert was introduced by Director Oskar Espina Ruiz. This was an unusual program designed by pianist Benjamin Hochman, world-renowned Steinway Artist, with violinist Benjamin Bowman, Concertmaster of the Metropolitan Opera, and Joel Noyes, cellist for the Metropolitan Opera. The concert's theme was the infectious influence of Ludwig van Beethoven on subsequent composers.

They opened with Piano Trio in C Minor, Opus 1, No. 3 (1794-95), a work rarely played. Composed while Beethoven was studying under the genial tutoring of Franz Joseph Haydn, the work has remained controversial from the start. Beethoven performed the work at one of the Friday weekly musicales at the Prince Karl Lichnowsky household in Vienna. Haydn attended and spoke positively about Opus 1, No. 1 and Opus 1, No. 2, but objected to the possible publication of Opus 1, No.3. Consequently, the publication of these three trios was dedicated not to Haydn but to the host Lichnowsky. Haydn had assisted Beethoven's development of form, yet balked at Beethoven's expressive and energetic originality.

The first movement of Opus 1, No. 3 remains conventional in the vein of Mozart at his most conservative approach in sonata form with ascending scales and well-balanced structure; one might say that this part displays Beethoven as a good pupil, behaving well in polite society. The second movement lyrical rondo appears to ask too many questions that don't have simple answers: the audience is challenged to think for themselves. The passionate third movement displays pianistic pyrotechnics with ambiguous rhythms and difficult string

passages, especially for the violin. Heated personal emotion displaces polite conversation as Beethoven declares his singular, creative explosion, like a super-nova star. The finale gives one the feeling that Beethoven's musical abilities are unbounded.
The trio performed with an astonishing close-knit unity which was infectious, as well as ruggedly explosive. It was as if Beethoven was resurrected, standing naked before the audience. Hochman's fingers sounded as if they burning with emotion while Bowman forcefully enunciated cascades of 1/16th notes while straining not to fall from his chair. On cello, Noyes was more solemn, yet he bowed with such stern and biting resonance that it was clear he owned the foundation which supported both instruments that soared above him. The audience exploded with vociferous applause and demanded a second bow!

They then played Piano Trio (1921) by Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979), a noted female viola player and composer born in England to an American father and German mother. Under the pseudonym of "Anthony Trent" this piano trio garnered second place at the Berkshire Music Festival in Pittsfield, Mass. Today, this nearly forgotten trio has been recently re-evaluated and acclaimed as an overlooked masterpiece. (Some of her compositions have never been published.)

For its time, this work sounds quite modern to the ear. The cheerful, romantic first-movement opening invokes considerable yet moderate passion, while the second movement appears to ask many questions, perhaps about love and commitment. (Her father had been a notorious womanizer, throwing Rebecca out of their home and disowning her because she criticized his many affairs.) The series of unconventional questions in the second movement appears to have been influenced by Beethoven, yet they are her distinctive feminine, captivating voice. These questions are likely addressed to her father.
The vigorous third movement with ambiguous rhythms is likely to have been inspired by Beethoven's third movement of Opus 1, No. 3. Clarke appears, like Beethoven, to be declaring her own singular identity with serious, independent passion. I had not known of this work and was grateful for its current resurrection which may inspire further appreciation of her work which was performed ardently by three men with such affectionate sincerity.
After intermission, the trio performed Piano Trio in E-flat Major, Op. 100, D.929 by Franz Schubert (1797-1828). The trio began in November of 1827, six months after the death of Beethoven, and subsequently published one year later from the month of Schubert's death. The death of the "God of Music" (Beethoven's nickname in contemporary China) had a profound effect on Schubert.
The first movement has many lyrical repetitions, however sweet the tunes. I take this repetition to be a somewhat labored, ironic satire on ordinary polite social conversation, yet there are other interpretations, like an endorsement of charming social discourse at an elite gathering. In any case, the first movement parallels the drama of average expectations for social conformity, as in the first movement of Beethoven's Opus 1, No. 3.
The processional piano's opening in the second movement presents a funereal recollection of Beethoven's death with a reference to Beethoven's Eroica. The third movement boisterously celebrates the tremendous achievement of Beethoven, employing subtle echoes of various compositions of Beethoven. While this movement alludes to Beethoven, Schubert's musical language is his crowning achievement. Once more the unity of the performing trio offered near-symphonic quality for the astonishing finale from a small, eloquent trio playing in amazing form as they paid homage to both Beethoven and Schubert with galvanized joy!
The audience demanded three bows…. This was an incredible and marvelous concert that opened a new season of classical concerts at Music Mountain where the echoes of Hochman, Bowman, and Noyes are still ringing in my ears.
Next Sunday features the Baldouret Quartet with Oskar Espina Ruiz on clarinet. The program: Mozart, String Quartet in D Minor, K. 421; "Haydn" Anna Weesner, The Eight Lost Songs of Orlando Underground for clarinet quintet; Beethoven, String Quartet in F Minor, Op. 59, No. 1. There is also a free family concert at 2 pm.

Benjamin Hochman

The Boston Musical Intelligencer

April 24, 2024

BCMS Hyper-Expresses

By Lee Eisman

Boston Chamber Music Society Artistic Director Marcus Thompson may have sat out the Society's concert at Jordan Hall last Sunday, but his good work went fully on display in the bright green program insert of next season's plans. The series comprises a rewarding-looking blend of 11 concerts—all in Sanders. [Brochure HERE.] And while you are in the mood for clicking, consider reading Rebecca Marchand's important essays on the offerings [HERE].

Pianists Benjamin Hochman, and Max Levinson delivered a brilliant account of Debussy's *En blanc et noir*, reveling in the cascades through forests of ivory and ebony, and never getting lost in the underbrush. Punchy notes lined up perfectly and arpeggios intertwined with carefree but accurate abandon. *Avec emportement* roiled in rhapsodic waters, glowing with radiance and wit. The quick, scary opening of *Lent. Sombre*, martial and funereal at first, becomes consoling as a bright chorale of longing intercedes—somber but with a rhythmic backbone. The motoric portions sounded clear but never notey; the players embraced the Luther hymn *Ein' feste Burg* with joyful pathos. Appropriately resorting to the una corda at times, Hochman and Levinson completely eschewed the competitive banginess that can wear out the welcome of this repertoire. Scherzando, licensed the teams to engage in winning pixie noodling as abstractions and cross-rhythms built meaning. Contrasts of texture and character morphed by with precision as ensemble never wavered. We imagined the expiring heart of Till Eulenspiegel toward the end of this polished and affectionate traversal.

Marchand writes of Paul Schoenfield's *Café Music* (1986) for piano trio:

Paul Schoenfield retired from the composition faculty at University of Michigan in 2021 and has continued to be a dedicated Talmudic scholar as well as a self-described amateur mathematician. He studied piano with Rudolf Serkin in Vermont and composition with Robert Muczynski at University of Arizona, where Schoenfield earned a DMA in 1970.

The concept for *Café Music* came to Schoenfield when he was sitting in one night for the pianist of the house trio at Murray's Restaurant in Minneapolis. Struck by the panoply of styles in the ensemble's setlist, he aimed to "write a kind of high-class dinner music—music which could be played at a restaurant, but might also (just barely) find its way into a concert hall." Indeed, the work is injected with Viennese classicism alongside American popular styles including those heard in Hollywood and on Broadway, sounds of hot club-style jazz out of Paris in the 1930s, as well as Jewish folk music.

Violinist Jennifer Frautschi cavorting like a Grappelli, cellist Raman Ramakrishnan doing his Charles Mingus thing (an octave higher), and pianist Levinson presiding like a Fats Waller manque, gave a deliciously over-the-top interpretation, evoking for me a chamber version of the Comedian Harmonists or the foxtrot epidemic in Ernst Lubitsch's "Oyster Princess." Be it tango, rag or skat, Schoenfeld's exuberance sounded like Bolcom unchained. Levinson began the middle movement Rubato. Andante moderato as a slow rag on Chassidic impressions. Very bluesy violin and cello contributions poured out with almost unbearable emotion ending with slides evoking blues notes in "Bess, You is my woman" on the violin and "comin' home" on the cello. Astor Piazzolla seemed present for the fast and explosive Presto. Schoenfeld gave the three players great equality in the wild, charging, Cab Calloway humor and the players responded with irresistible verve.

One might posit Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* as the hyper destination on a path that began with the first dramatically cohesive song cycle, Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte*. Other forks in the well-traveled path: melodramas by Lizst such as *Lenore,* Richard Strauss's extended melodrama *Enoch Arden (1897)* (Tennyson), and Schoenberg's own hyper-romantic *Verklärte Nacht* of 1899 (though the Dehmel poems are not spoken or sung), String Quartet No. 2 (1907) with an agonizing high soprano segment, and *Erwartung* (1909) sung to an emotionally charged libretto by Marie Pappenheim.

Pierrot Lunaire's three-times-seven numbers, set to Otto Erich Hartleben's German translations of French poems by Émile Alber Kayenberg (pen name Albert Giroud) depict some bloody lunacy on the parts of commedia dell'arte characters. This is not your grandmother's melodrama, nor is it an etude on tone row theories. To begin with, Schoenberg's atonal language is ripe with hyperexpression, word painting, and total theatricality. Not only does Schoenberg blacken the score with accidentals, he also litters the staves with almost continuous indications relating to dynamics, tempos, colorations, and pauses. We witnessed not a single unconsidered or inexpressive instant in the 35 minutes.

Hochman took the fiendish piano part securely hand, dispatching it with such sovereign ease that he could fully engage with the plot, as it were. Raman Ramakrishnan spanned huge and weird rolled chords on the cello and grinned with pleasure at his accomplishments. Whether clarinetist Romie de Guise-Langlois, flutist Tara Helen O'Connor, or violinist Frautschi, were shining moonbeams, occluding visions with blood, or dancing with strewn blossoms, they supplied color, fire, mystery, and humor. The perfection of instrumental ensemble served to elevate soprano Lucy Shelton on her raised throne.

Few understand the requirements of *Sprechstimme* as well as Shelton [Schoenberg's foreword[HERE]; it's nothing like Rex Harrison talking through the songs in *My Fair Lady*. Schoenberg suggested approximate adherence to pitch and demanded strict adherence to duration, and the occasional dotted half notes require sustained tone. Only a very few times does the composer indicate duration without pitch. Shelton's usually audible, un-miked flight path spanned more than two octaves, and her variety of

coloration astonished. She belted a *fff* glissando across a 14th, plus, she expressed with face and gesture like a 19th-century Lieder singer in *Elrkönig* even when erupting in passing strange and rarely very lyrical stanzas. We are glad she ignored the composer's admonition to avoid over interpreting. The last words, O alter Du——-ft—aus Mä——-rchenzeit (O redolence from fairytales) are still hanging in the air.

Benjamin Hochman

KEYS WEEKLY

February 14, 2024

YOUNG CELLIST & PIANIST TAKE STAGE IN THE FLORIDA KEYS

By Asta Kraskouskas

Florida Keys Concert Association presented its second concert of the season at Coral Shores and Marathon high schools with Zlatomir Fung on Jan. 22-23. He's the youngest cellist to win first prize at the Tchaikovsky Competition; in the Keys, he played with acclaimed pianist and conductor Benjamin Hochman.

The evening's program included music of Robert Schumann, a 19th century German romantic; Marshall Estrin, a 21st century New York-based modern classic; Benjamin Britten, a 20th century British classic, and Sulkhan Tsintsadze, a 20th century Georgian classic. The four compositions had one thing in common — they all had five movements. Fung explained that for a long time he had an idea of playing a program of five movements.

"A composer has to put an extra effort to compose five movements," Fung said.

Fung, of Bulgarian and Chinese heritage, was born into a family of mathematicians. He is the second youngest in the family. Of the three other siblings, only the youngest brother plays music. The cellist's hobbies are movies and playing chess. His cello is a

rare Domenico Montagnana instrument of circa 1729.

Fung's musical mission has three aspects. First, he loves playing music as a craft. Second, Fung loves sharing interesting music. Third is to have a special experience — a space that happens between him and the audience. The 24-year-old cellist has already proven himself a star among the next generation of world-class musicians. At the concert, he executed every composition, every movement, every sound with intense emotion.

"I enjoyed the depth of the talent," Cynthia Finamore, a season ticket holder, said.

Hochman's mission is to make great art. He plays solo recitals, concerts, chamber music and conducts orchestras. Hochman claims that he loves music and loves making it at the highest level.

Hochman was born and raised in Israel. He has one elder brother, a mathematician. His parents are professors of literature. Hochman's hobbies include running, cooking and spending time with friends and family. As a soloist, he loves playing Schubert, Schumann, Beethoven and Brahms.

During the concert, Hochman was technically and emotionally connected with Fung's playing in such a manner that it impressed everyone.

Hochman said contemporary music is very broad. Sometimes it takes time to listen to it for the second time.

"There are a few factors. There is a factor of fear. Try to be open. Not immediately have an opinion. Try to have an experience. It is important to keep an open mind," he said.

Fung said it is important to play new contemporary composers.

"You never know, will a new music work be liked? Sometimes there is no choice. If the composition is commissioned, we have to play it. The most important thing for contemporary music is to be played by a second person. (It says something when) the piece is picked up by someone else and is played again."

Fung said that 10 years ago, he heard the Georgian composer Tsintsadze's musical work for the first and only time. It sounded very dear to him. The cellist loved it so much that it became one of the few pieces that he wanted to play himself. That was the very last musical composition that the audience had a chance to hear and enjoy.

Benjamin Hochman

KEYS WEEKLY

February 14, 2024

YOUNG CELLIST & PIANIST TAKE STAGE IN THE FLORIDA KEYS

By Asta Kraskouskas

Florida Keys Concert Association presented its second concert of the season at Coral Shores and Marathon high schools with Zlatomir Fung on Jan. 22-23. He's the youngest cellist to win first prize at the Tchaikovsky Competition; in the Keys, he played with acclaimed pianist and conductor Benjamin Hochman.

The evening's program included music of Robert Schumann, a 19th century German romantic; Marshall Estrin, a 21st century New York-based modern classic; Benjamin Britten, a 20th century British classic, and Sulkhan Tsintsadze, a 20th century Georgian classic. The four compositions had one thing in common — they all had five movements. Fung explained that for a long time he had an idea of playing a program of five movements.

"A composer has to put an extra effort to compose five movements," Fung said.

Fung, of Bulgarian and Chinese heritage, was born into a family of mathematicians. He is the second youngest in the family. Of the three other siblings, only the youngest brother plays music. The cellist's hobbies are movies and playing chess. His cello is a

rare Domenico Montagnana instrument of circa 1729.

Fung's musical mission has three aspects. First, he loves playing music as a craft. Second, Fung loves sharing interesting music. Third is to have a special experience — a space that happens between him and the audience. The 24-year-old cellist has already proven himself a star among the next generation of world-class musicians. At the concert, he executed every composition, every movement, every sound with intense emotion.

"I enjoyed the depth of the talent," Cynthia Finamore, a season ticket holder, said.

Hochman's mission is to make great art. He plays solo recitals, concerts, chamber music and conducts orchestras. Hochman claims that he loves music and loves making it at the highest level.

Hochman was born and raised in Israel. He has one elder brother, a mathematician. His parents are professors of literature. Hochman's hobbies include running, cooking and spending time with friends and family. As a soloist, he loves playing Schubert, Schumann, Beethoven and Brahms.

During the concert, Hochman was technically and emotionally connected with Fung's playing in such a manner that it impressed everyone.

Hochman said contemporary music is very broad. Sometimes it takes time to listen to it for the second time.

"There are a few factors. There is a factor of fear. Try to be open. Not immediately have an opinion. Try to have an experience. It is important to keep an open mind," he said.

Fung said it is important to play new contemporary composers.

"You never know, will a new music work be liked? Sometimes there is no choice. If the composition is commissioned, we have to play it. The most important thing for contemporary music is to be played by a second person. (It says something when) the piece is picked up by someone else and is played again."

Fung said that 10 years ago, he heard the Georgian composer Tsintsadze's musical work for the first and only time. It sounded very dear to him. The cellist loved it so much that it became one of the few pieces that he wanted to play himself. That was the very last musical composition that the audience had a chance to hear and enjoy.

Benjamin Hochman

The Boston Globe

November 19, 2023

Boston Philharmonic Orchestra presents an emotional, exhilarating evening with unexpectedly tender conclusions

By Leo Sarbanes

On an emotional evening Friday at Symphony Hall, the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra presented a program of uplifting musical farewells alongside works of profound psychological despair. Bartók's cheerful Piano Concerto No. 3, featuring a sparkling Benjamin Hochman as soloist, and a beloved concert-closing encore buoyed the audience's spirits amid searing performances of Britten's Passacaglia from "Peter Grimes" and Shostakovich's Symphony No. 10.

In opening remarks, music director Benjamin Zander dedicated the performance to his former wife and lifelong friend Rosamund Stone Zander, who died in September. Ms. Zander, he shared, had been the "inspiration and spiritual guide" for the orchestra since its founding 45 years ago. He portrayed the program's stark juxtaposition of light and darkness as a reflection of her ability to offer solace and "coax harmony from the discords of life."

Bartók's Piano Concerto was a breath of summer air, a respite from the other works and the November gusts outside. Written by an ailing Bartók for his wife, Ditta, right up until his passing, it conveys an exhilarating love of life even in the face of personal tragedy.

Hochman led the work with refreshing calm, clarity, and friendliness: almost every note seemed to wear a smile. In his hands, the opening melody with its unpredictable warbles felt like a natural conversation starter. And the Philharmonic proved a receptive partner, particularly in the second movement's "Andante religioso," where gorgeously blended chorale textures from strings, winds, and soloist were carried by a gentle breeze. Against this backdrop, the nature sounds of the movement's middle section, usually considered a classic example of Bartók's "night-music," readily evoked the coming of dawn.

In the finale, the orchestra brilliantly executed Bartók's swings from folk dance to Baroque dance, so that Hochman's return to the stage for a Bach Sarabande was a perfect companion. Indeed, Hochman's encore demonstrated enlightening continuity with his approach to the Bartók, respecting the integrity of each individual tone and embracing the silences in between them.

The program opened with Britten's Passacaglia, an interlude from the opera "Peter Grimes" that vividly depicts its title character's descent into madness. The cellos and basses kept their plucked skeleton buried deep beneath the vulnerable, yearning viola solo, heartbreakingly intoned by Noriko Futagami, but the motto never lost its bone-chilling clarity as the music grew to terrifying heights. Zander, with relentless forward momentum, riveted his listeners' attention to that bassline even as fanfares, taunts, and squeals erupted from every direction.

That sense of focused dread returned in full force for Shostakovich's symphony. Shostakovich casts much of his extremely long opening movement in shadow, but the Philharmonic's shadows advanced searchingly rather than wallowing in desolation. Rane Moore's longing clarinet seemed to blossom directly from the winding melodies the strings gathered in the darkness. Her tune led off a superb all-

around effort by the winds and brass, featuring Rachel Braude's masterful piccolo, Kevin Owen's mysterious horn calls, and the unbearable loneliness of the final movement's opening laments passed between oboe, flute, and bassoon. The first movement's earth-shattering climaxes felt like the Philharmonic was playing the entire hall as an instrument: Shostakovich's characteristic interplay between blistering high notes and menacing low brass became a richly textured crunch rather than just a wall of sound.

In the frenetic second movement, the orchestra created the exhilarating feeling that things might fly off the handle even as it displayed impressive technical precision. On the podium, Zander thrillingly conveyed that danger, bobbing and crouching as if desperate to keep Shostakovich's terror under control. That desperation left an impression on the rest of the performance, from the spiky devil's dances of the third movement to the white-knuckle finale. Shostakovich's ultimate assertion of individual freedom in his first symphony after Stalin's death was convincingly delivered by the orchestra, not least by the horn section's jaw-dropping blasts, spurring the audience to its feet.

But Zander left us by returning to his opening tribute. After sharing some of his former wife's defining words of wisdom, he selected Elgar's "Nimrod" from his Enigma Variations as a way of celebrating her life and friendship. The conductor and his orchestra rendered the work with warm, serene familiarity, bringing the evening to an unexpectedly tender conclusion.

Benjamin Hochman

The Millbrook Independent

June 5, 2023

From Bach to Mozart at Music Mountain

By Kevin T. McEneaney

Under a cool panorama of gray clouds, the four-month program of heightened, altitude music with summer air-conditioning and vista views opened at Music Mountain with Benjamin Hochman on piano leading in J.S. Bach's *Keyboard Concerto in F Minor, BWV* 1056 (1738). A late work for harpsichord, this piece provides more left-hand fingering amid pell-mell idiosyncratic flair conjuring an ambiance of spontaneous improvisation which Hochman captured with seemingly effortless acrobatics at keyboard. Accompanied by two violins, viola, cello, and bass, this work delivered unified orchestral sound blending with impressive rhythmic pace.

The program presented the influence of Bach on Mozart. Three fugues from Bach's *Well-tempered Clavier for Strings Quarter, K. 405* arranged by Mozart followed. Enhanced by the brilliant orchestration of Mozart, these fugues sounded like mini-symphonies outside of their historical period. Hochman at keyboard was impressive with higher harpsichord-like inflection. Mozart's arrangement captured the exuberant joy of Bach's celebratory inclination for all instruments.

Keyboard concerto in E Major, BWV 1053 (1738) allowed first violinist Kobi Malkin to excel with a recent American-made violin constructed in 2019 which had melodious pitch. Raman Ramakrishnan on cello provided eloquent foundation. Jessica Thompson on viola offered lyrical angles while Nancy Wu on second violin delivered subtle support. This early pre-Leipzig cantata symphonia offers lively interplay of instruments smoothy integrated with keyboard panache.

The opening of *Adagio and Fugue in C Minor K.546* (1788) by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart has been described as violent or mystical, yet to me it was arresting with the theme of chaos evolving to Masonic symmetry. Once plunged into the task of the fugue, a geometric flow takes over with soothing repetition that borders on the predictable. In this performance Raman Ramakrishnan's cello provided splendid ballast for the ethereal first violin of Nancy Wu. Jessica Thompson's viola rounded out edges while Kobi Malkin on second violin provided loyal support for the symmetry of the work. There is a triangulation between cello, viola, and violin with the second violin nodding in approval. One might say that the

piece is an allegory for that period's concept of the process of Creation. The Fugue felt like it was rapidly solving the correct pattern for a Rubiks cube. While exercising a calm complexity within Bach-like structure, it offered more shadowy, intriguing contemplation than the exuberant delight one usually finds in a Bach fugue. This was the sixth performance of this slightly enigmatic yet satisfying work at Music Mountain.

This Saturday evening, Jazz fans will be delighted to hear the 7-time Grammy Award winner Paul Winter with his Consort performing a program titled *This Glorious Earth* with singers Wolf, Whale, Wood Thrush, and other members of what Winter calls "the greater symphony of the Earth."

More amusing and sunny was Mozart's *Piano Concerto in E-flat Major, K.449* (184) with Benjamin Hochman adroitly and enthusiastically leading as if he were teaching a class where a dialogue develops with the piano professor querying student instruments who provide replies to musical questions. Satisfied with student answers in the first movement, the piano asks more challenging questions to the instruments as they rise beyond more self-evident answers. The professor piano is well-pleased and poses more difficult queries and conundrums which receive more sophisticated replies. Now they are ready for the third movement, which is to play as equals in chamber ensemble as the piano leads the ensemble into orchestral resonance. Double-bassist Leigh Mesh was outstanding. I was a little shocked that this amusing gem had not been performed before at Music Mountain, since this work is such a charming closer. Perhaps if there are sharp, divisive arguments in a large corporate board, they should hire this group to recall how pleasant and meaningful and transcendent a group might become if they "sing" with empathetic unity!

Benjamin Hochman

HYDE PARK HERALD

January 23, 2023

Young cellist makes a splash at Mandel Hall

By M.L. Rantala

University of Chicago Presents has begun the new year in style. The first concert of 2023 featured young cello sensation Zlatomir Fung along with seasoned pianist Benjamin Hochman. Together they escorted their audience on a journey through examples of Slavic music, most of which were little-known gems given sparkling treatment. A decent-sized Mandel audience on Friday night, Jan. 20 was appreciative and attentive throughout this well-constructed program.

Fung is of Bulgarian-Chinese heritage and was born in 1999 in Corvallis, Oregon. He began studying cello at the age of three, using the Suzuki method, and by the time he was a teenager he was winning numerous competitions. This work culminated in a performance at the International Tchaikovsky Competition, where in 2019 Fung became the youngest musician to win First Prize in the cello division and the first American to do so in four decades. (The Chicago Symphony Orchestra's own John Sharp, principal cello, is another American to have won a Tchaikovsky medal; he took third place in 1986.)

Hochman, born in 1980 in Jerusalem, brought a wide range of musical experience to his performance, as he works not only as a piano soloist and chamber musician but also conductor. An auto-immune disease prevented Hochman from playing piano for a time, during which he developed his conducting skills. He also teaches at Bard College Berlin.

The main work on their program was Shostakovich's Cello Sonata in D minor, Op. 40, composed in 1934. The composer was only 28 at the time and completed the sonata in just over a month. It premiered on Christmas Day that year, with Viktor Lubatsky as cellist (the piece was also dedicated to him) and Shostakovich himself at the piano.

Fung and Hochman dived into the music with gusto, Fung introducing the first theme with stylish understatement while the piano offered light, fluttering arpeggios. The Allegro's perpetual motion sections were astonishingly rapid and beautifully rounded by both players. They were carefully and joyfully coordinated even at the most extreme tempos, always ending absolutely together.

The Largo was thoughtful and sensitively played and my only criticism of Fung's entire evening of playing comes here: he really wanted to give the quiet passages a truly soft touch and sound. But this meant that even though I was six rows from the stage and almost directly in front of Fung, a lot of the sound was imperceptible to me. Soft is one thing; silence is another. But the stirring final movement won me over with the piano sizzling through popping chords and the cello offering fluid and purposeful movement.

There were two other works on the program that spanned about 20 minutes each, offering a look into the music of composers not typically found on an American program. Six Pieces by Yuri Shaporin (1887–1966) gave the audience a sample of the music by a composer born in Ukraine. The first piece, Russian Song, was romantic and lyrical and Fung drew out the muted sadness with his swelling phrasing. There were two waltzes, both offering complex and intriguing melodies with lilting meters. Fung's singing tone for the concluding Romance was particularly lovely.

Composer Leo Ornstein (1893–2020) was also born in Ukraine and was one of those rare people whose life spanned the entirety of the 20th century and then some. Ornstein came to the U.S. with his family when he was 13. His compositional output was varied and then became distinctly unusual. The program notes say that he had a period of composition where his music was "so strange, so violent, so assaultive, that it seemed to come from another universe." Some of this music was not wholly comprehensible on a first hearing, which means that the listener is at a slight disadvantage the first time around. But this pair of performers really dug deep into the score and offered a compelling performance that made you want to understand the composer's intentions. I am looking forward to listening to this work again when it is rebroadcast on WFMT FM. (It is expected to air on Monday, Feb. 13 at 8 p.m. but check listings for confirmation.)

There were two short charmers on the program as well. Nikolay Sokolov's Romance for Cello and Piano is a three-minute song for cello that Fung offered with lyrical gracefulness while Hochman provided delicate, detailed keyboard work.

Alexander Glazunov's Entr'acte from "Raymonda" is not a work originally constructed for cello and piano, but Fung told the audience that he has loved this music for a long time and always wanted to perform a cello arrangement and his dedication in the performance proved he does indeed revere this tiny piece. Fung was expressive, soothing, and above all peaceful.

They offered a splendid encore, the second movement of Prokofiev's Cello Sonata in C major, which was dispatched with flair and ease.

Benjamin Hochman

The Millbrook Independent

August 16, 2021

Benjamin Hochman Captivates at The Stissing Center

By Tonia Shoumatoff

Benjamin Hochman, piano virtuoso extraordinaire, played to a packed house of over 135 masked and vaccinated listeners at The Stissing Center in Pine Plains on August 13, 2021. Having only performed in a digital concert for his previous engagement at the Center due to the pandemic, he acknowledged how much it meant to him to play to a live audience, saying, "To make music, live, in a room full of people is so meaningful to me."

Hochman did not disappoint. His adept touch, subtle volume variations, passionate and distinctive interpretations of Beethoven, Brahms, Debussy, and a modern piece by Hannah Kendall delighted the audience.

Starting with Beethoven's *Piano Sonata no. 27 in e-minor*, composed in the late summer of 1814 when Beethoven was nearly completely deaf, Hochman slowly captured the gradual lively expressiveness intended for the sonata with his subtle changes of pressure on keys as the melody kept rising and rearising at different moments throughout the two-movement 13-minute sonata. Beethoven called this piece a "contest of head and heart." Hochman's dexterous finger work on the keyboard allowed the listener to be increasingly taken by surprise each time the melody was heard again, which was as refreshing as a cool drink on a hot day.

The second selection was Hannah Kendall's *Processional*, inspired by Norman Lewis's painting titled *Procession*, a vivid abstract depiction of the bloody civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. Hochman read Kendall's description of the composition which stated that she was drawn to interpreting the meaning of the painting of the march because she felt it to be as relevant today as when Norman Lewis depicted it. The composition started with piercingly high notes whose echoes were almost painful, becoming gradually lower, finally evolving into an almost impossibly serpentine crescendo of trills requiring amazing keyboard work. Hochman brought to life the impact intended by this work.

The correspondence between fragrance, sound, and color, in three of Debussy's *Preludes* from Book One, based on poems from Baudelaire's avant-garde *Les Fleurs du Mal*, were captured with panache by Hochman. Cascading ripples of tinkling piano keys, like sunlight (or moonlight)

dancing on the edges of ocean waves challenged the listener to hear the synesthesia of color and sound evoked by the mysterious, poetic sequences. Delicately unfolding each note, one after the other, like steps going up and under and into another dimension, hands crossing over each other and back again, Hochman succeeded in creating the feeling of a mysterious fantasy, gradually getting more elaborate, finally ending in a cascade of sparkling sound.

The crescendo of the evening took place when Hochman played Brahms' *Fantasies, op.116*. Starting out almost as a lament, Hochman found the rhythm and sequence within the intensity of the piece by using his astounding mastery of the keyboard and the sustaining foot pedal, to express the changes in volume and tone, almost standing up at one point to emphasize the depth required by the composition. Hochman achieved a delicate compromise in hard and soft by sometimes almost tentatively touching the keys to bring each note alive, more fully alive, with tiny moments of tenderness and then at other moments using a more vigorous approach to the emotionalism expressed by the composition by plunging down on the keys.

Hochman's adroit technique of varied pressure, sometimes seeming like strokes in flight, and then building up to the powerful finale unveiling the daunting and almost apocalyptic revelations of the struggle and intense emotionalism inherent in the piece.

Music critics have stated that Opus 116 expresses Brahms' complicated, unfulfilled love for Clara Schumann. Hochman received a thunderous standing ovation for his interpretation of this difficult composition with the audience continuing to clap after he left the room, demanding an encore. He came back with Cheshire cat smile to play a welcome encore of Franz Liszt's *Dream of Love*.

Benjamin Hochman

The Millbrook Independent

July 26, 2020

Benjamin Hochman's Lyric Touch at Stissing Center

By Kevin T. McEneaney

On Saturday afternoon at the new Stissing Center in Pine Plains on live-stream broadcast pianist Benjamin Hochman performed *Klavierstück*, Op. 119 by Johannes Brahms. This late piano work presents a meditation on life, especially the lyrical moments of childhood memories. An elemental simplicity pervades the recurring, harmonic refrain that conjures childhood memories. Here the redolent phrasing of the notes must sing with the joy of wonder, as it is tinged with the realization of mortality leading to silence. Hochman excelled at the melancholy, lyrical phrasing that this work demands. Hochman transported me elsewhere.

While the dominant refrain in this 1892 piece demands uniformity, it also wears the burden of gentle pathos with the graceful touch Hochman provided. This sentimental refrain, in a structural sense, may have been influenced by Frederic Chopin's more robust Ballades, but done in a sweet Viennese manner.

As in the late work of Antonín Dvořák, memory brims with recollection of a lost world, which became a late Romantic-revival nineteenth century theme before World War I; Dvorak influenced Willa Cather's masterpiece *My Antonia* and perhaps Brahms influenced Proust, although we know that Maurice Ravel's chamber music and Renaldo Hahn were the main musical influences on Proust. The mystery with which Brahms endows the lyric refrain delivers poignancy that makes one breathless, just as the closing Rhapsody, which begins in a major key but closes in a minor, astonishes.

Brahms was re-inventing the Romantic miniature—as in Schubert's *Impromptus*, composed in 1827, the first four being published that year and the next four posthumously. Hochman played the last four posthumous Impromptus of the eight.

The opening rondo appears to be a sonata without development. Here the pianistic dynamics and pedal are paramount. Hochman played with finesse, especially in odd, tricky moments of cross-handed playing whose flourish may be overly highlighted by less capable pianists.

These four Impromptus are obviously meant to be a set played together. A melody refrain in the middle of the second Impromptu, my favorite, repeats with a haunting lyricism relating to childhood, and I still struggle to both retain and excise that compelling refrain as childhood recollections swelled in my consciousness.

The arpeggio runs in the third and fourth Impromptus remain sheer delight as if recounting the youthful pleasures of flirtation and social dancing, accompanied by the uncertain quandary of tentative courtship.

Hochman was devoid of showboating and was effectively in service to the subtle and nuanced emotions of the music.

The video photography by J. Henry Fair has its own subtle rhythms with adept close-ups of piano fingerings and concert room panoramas when the observation of fingering might pose a distraction to the flow of music.

If you missed this live stream, you will be able to hear the complete fifty-minute recording of *An Evening with Benjamin Hochman* here.

Benjamin Hochman

The Boston Musical Intelligencer

February 17, 2020

BCMS's "Darkness and Deliverance"

By Leon Golub

Some musicians have the rare ability of sending the music they play right to the hearts of their audience. The Boston Chamber Music Society musicians who performed Sunday afternoon in Sanders Theater did just that. How did they do it? Was it their special level of coordination with one another? Was it some deeply shared insight into the music? Was it Marcus Thompson's initiative of proposing the theme of "Darkness and Deliverance" as a way of probing the scores? Guest artists, pianist Benjamin Hochman and cellist Nicholas Canellakis, joined Jennifer Frautschi and Marcus Thompson seamlessly, communicating and interacting as if they had been playing together for years, conveying layers of unsuspected depth.

The program comprised three gems not often performed, two in C minor, and one nominally in C-sharp minor. Spanning three centuries, all three works marked a compositional point of no return, at the same time outward-looking and expressively expansive. And yes, as performed on Sunday by the BCMS and guests, they delivered gripping darkness and deliverance.

In his dedication to Count von Browne, Beethoven wrote of his Op. 9 string trios "l'auteur aurait la satisfaction…de presenter…la meilleure de ses oeuvres." No. 3, in C Minor, is the most expressively dramatic of the three, indicated explicitly by the markings for the four movements: Con Spirito, Con Espressione, Allegro molto e vivace, and Presto.

Violinist Frautschi led the opening Allegro with a deft serpentine insinuating line that morphed into questioning, then into a grazioso that moved into sadness, brooding and reproach, creating a continuous Ariadne thread through a complex labyrinth dark and shifting moods. The ensemble playing was expressive without being overly dramatic, the coda light and delicate moving into mystery. In the aria-like adagio, Thompson and Canellakis surrounded Frautschi with beautiful and discretely nuanced shadows. Frautschi again led in the scherzo, seeking to move out of the darkness and encouraged by viola and cello, all forceful and focused. The trio was particularly effective, evoking restorative forces of repair and surface tones. The presto finale brought deliverance, the three voices distinct but unified, the violin coaxed to cross the threshold of new life, encouraged by viola and cello to move forward into immensity.

Bartók dedicated both of his Violin Sonatas to the beautiful and talented Jelly d'Aranyi, both works premiered with Bartok at the piano in the early 1920s, at the start of Bartok's middle period. In these years his compositions reached a peak of Expressionist dissonance, colorfully labelled "aggressive ugliness" by contemporary critics. Bartók, enamored of d'Aranyi, seems to have allowed his music to speak for him, to no avail as her true love had been killed in action in the World War.

If the Beethoven trio spoke of darkness and deliverance, Bartok's sonata, as delivered by Frautschi and Hochman, conveyed "trauma and survival." In an extraordinary feat of ruptured communication, they expressed the agony of a terror that cannot be named, with violence and emotional turmoil in the first movement, the violin both seeking and rejecting the piano's

puzzled and distraught help. In the adagio, a form of deliverance emerged as the violin was able to acquire the voice of the Libation bearer, the Weeper, while the piano tolled a solemn death knell, inexorable and eloquent. The final Allegro plunged us into a dangerous Totendanz, frenetic and seductive, evoking modernistic gears ready to crush us while propelling us manically to an unknown destiny and concluding with the marvelously primitive jarring of a fierce Aprózó. Frautschi and Hochman achieved an extraordinary intensity, sustained from start to finish through the rapidly shifting confrontations, retreats, attacks, occasional fusions, and repulsions that Bartók somehow wove into a coherent narrative.

Is Destiny Darkness? Is music deliverance? After five years of wooing, in 1877 Marianne Viardot agreed to marry Gabriel Fauré, but to his considerable distress she broke off the engagement after four months. His Piano Quartet No. 1 was composed during this tumultuous period, the first two movements lively, happy and energetic, the third movement adagio overflowing with sadness. We will apparently never know what the original finale conveyed, since Fauré destroyed it (deliverance?) and replaced it with a new finale for the quartet's publication in 1884. In France a disastrous love affair (*un chagrin d'amour*) is no trivial event or source of shame. It is really a badge of honor, a cherished scar that attests to living life fully, to full membership in humanity, experience of the sacred and connection to the sublime.

Joining all their voices, the BCMS players and their two guests opened the Quartet with a rich, beautiful ensemble *in medias res*, lush with a sort of oceanic swelling of emotions. They gave the Brahmsian first theme the full clout of destiny, balanced by the graceful imitative texture of the second theme to evoke the contingent manifold of the moment with its untapped possibilities. The scherzo struck this listener as a distinctly French hymn of gallantry in praise of the heart. The heart throbs when plucked by colors, forms, perfumes and the sight of the beloved. It lets itself become dizzy but never loses its grip. Without it, life would have no meaning. When it loves, it colors everything with warmth (the trio section). Grace inhabits it and dilates it. When it is broken, our whole being suffers shipwreck and sinks into unutterable darkness.

Cellist Canellakis initiated the dark and funereal dirge of the Adagio with just the kind of magnificent simplicity that Fauré intended. Violin, viola and piano joined in to add further darkness, saturating the music with lamentation until it acquired an aura of *musica sacra,* nursing suffering under a vast tent of darkness and stars, where human wretchedness, no matter how private and paltry, is cosmically acknowledged and redeemed. After this astonishing catharsis, Hochman's piano opened a path to new wisdom finale, secretly infused with a recovering *joie de vivre* that triumphs over melancholy through humanistic acceptance of what befalls us. The performers subtly juxtaposed Fauré's two analytic themes, shaping the c minor theme to evoke deliverance and rekindling of hope, and shaping the tonally ambiguous second theme to evoke the mysterious work of memory, extracting beauty from darkness, deliverance from shipwreck. What else is music but our collective ability to do so, again and again? The audience filling Sanders Theater was deeply moved by the concert and gave the performers an unaffected and sincere ovation. The BCMS has developed a real bond of trust with their audience, and this trust helps to create an intimate atmosphere conducive to playing of the highest order and of the deepest meaning.

Benjamin Hochman

BDN BANGOR DAILY NEWS

November 13, 2019

Symphony's skills, shortcomings displayed in Sunday concert

By Judy Harrison

The Bangor Symphony Orchestra on Sunday displayed all of its skills and shortcomings in one concert at the Collins Center for the Arts.

Its performance of Serge Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 3 with soloist Benjamin Hochman was electrifying. Lucas Richman's "Polonaise for Podge," commissioned by the children of 90-year-old Albert "Podge" Kossler, was charming. The youth orchestra's performance with their elders of Johannes Brahms' "Academic Festival Overture" was full of verve and hope.

Yet when the orchestra got to the Brahms' Symphony No. 3, the players appeared to have run out of gas, a problem the orchestra seemed to have overcome under Richman's baton. The maestro's style of conducting Sunday was much more animated during the final piece; it looked like he was pulling every note from the players as a dentist might have pulled teeth during the composer's lifetime. Brahm's died in 1897.

Somehow, that lackluster performance barely tarnished the impact of the entire program.

Hochman's performance with the orchestra was absolutely thrilling, and it will be remembered as a highlight of the BSO's 124th season. The piece, which took Prokofiev a decade to compose, is considered to be one of the most technically and physically demanding concertos of pianists. Hochman made playing it look easy as his hands seemed to lightly dance up and down the keyboard. Soloist, conductor and orchestra became one in a riveting performance.

A highlight of every season is the original piece Richman composes as part of the symphony's annual fundraising auction. Most often, Richman is asked to write a memorial to a loved one. This year, Kossler's family decided to surprise the former pharmacist and trumpet player with a polonaise as a birthday gift. He turned 90 last month.

A polonaise is a slow dance of Polish origin, in triple meter, consisting chiefly of a march or promenade in couples, according to dictionary.com. But Richman's heavy use of the brass, wind and percussion sections made "Polonaise for Podge" sounded more like Aaron Copland's "Fanfare for the Common Man" than a Polish dance. It was wonderful and a fitting tribute to Kossler and his generation.

During his nearly decade-long tenure with the BSO, Richman and his staff have revived and expanded the Bangor Symphony Youth Orchestras. The program now boasts 100 participants. More than 30 members of the youth program's Philharmonic Orchestra performed Brahms' overture Sunday with the seasoned BSO players.

Seeing Megan Cormier, a member of the youth orchestra, standing next to 85-year-old Billy Miller, who joined the orchestra in 1957, in the percussion section brought tears to the eyes of some longtime concertgoers. The energy the young performers brought to the concert hall was infectious showed there are young people eager and able to perform.

Richman, who first conducted the piece when he was 16 years old, beamed with

satisfaction during the bows. A vital piece of Richman's legacy will be the number of northern Maine students who embrace classical music and become supporters of, and perhaps, become players with, a symphony orchestra.

Benjamin Hochman

February 27, 2019

BENJAMIN HOCHMAN WITH NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC ENSEMBLE at Merkin Hall

By Joanna Barouch

Work- related injuries can be career-enders in many professions. It's a common occurrence in the sports world, where many a promising player has been permanently sidelined by arm, wrist, or hand problems. Musicians are prone to these injuries as well. From Robert Schumann to Paul Wittgenstein to Leon Fleischer to Lang Lang, pianists have been particularly susceptible to overuse and other injures.

After suffering a hand injury several years ago and a subsequent three year break from concertizing, Israeli-born pianist Benjamin Hochman made his successful re-entry into the New York musical scene on February 17, 2019 at Merkin Concert Hall. Performing with a small ensemble from the New York Philharmonic as part of their ensemble series, Mr. Hochman played with no hesitation whatsoever and certainly did not make things "easy" for himself. His partners for the Piano Quartet No.2 in G Minor, Op.45 by Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) were Ms.Quan Ge, violin, Ms.Dorian Rence, viola, and Ms. Ru-Pei Yeh, cello. In this lush, brilliant piece all of the players were equal. Mr.Hochman's exquisitely delicate yet powerful playing was matched in intensity and beauty by the New York Philharmonic musicians. Welcome back, Mr. Hochman!

Also on the program was Claude Debussy's Piano Trio in G major from 1880. With Mr. Kuan Cheng Lu on violin, Mr. Quiang Tu on cello, and Ms.Hélène Jeanney on piano, this piece sounded nothing like the Debussy we know and love in the twenty-first century. It was more a product of its late nineteenth-century time, with nary a whole-tone scale in sight. Debussy (1862-1918) wrote it when he was eighteen and still, as one critic wrote, in "feet-finding mode." This doesn't take away from the enjoyment the Philharmonic players and Ms. Jeanney found in performing it for this concert. Mr. Tu gave the audience some chills and thrills during his extended solo, and Ms. Jeanney performed with warm, beautifully nuanced energy, as did Mr. Lu in his sinuous violin solo moments.

J.S. Bach's Trio Sonata in C major, BWV 529 (1730?), opened the program. Originally an organ work, it was given a joyous reading by Mr. Kuan Cheng Lu on violin, Mr. Robert Rinehart on viola, and Mr. David J. Grossman on bass. The articulation of each cleanly placed note could be heard in the very lively acoustic of Merkin Hall. All three players seemed to be having a whale of a time playing this intricate work, and the audience had just as much fun listening to it.

The next Philharmonic Ensembles at Merkin Hall concerts take place on Sunday, April 7 and Sunday, May 26 2019. More information and tickets are available by calling 212-501-3330, online at kaufmanmusiccenter.org, or at the Box Office at 129 W.67thStreet between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue.

Benjamin Hochman

The Millbrook Independent
VOICE OF THE MILLBROOK REGION

June 10, 2019

LIGHTING THE FUSE AT MUSIC MOUNTAIN

By Kevin T. McEneaney

The magic of Music Mountain has begun its summer spell at Gordon Hall. The opening concert of the season featured Benjamin Hochman on piano. Three trios from the great three, Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms were performed.

Mozart's *Piano Trio in B-flat major, K. 502*, was an early piece written for pianoforte (1796). Mozart was inspired to write for this new instrument (and developing market) which delivered a much fuller sound. While Mozart is often a private composer, this three-movement piece is perhaps Mozart's most extroverted and accomplished piano trio with a lively conversational balance with violin, played sensitively by Alexi Kenney and accompanied with robust resonance on Fred Sherry's Cello, whose nickname is Orange Beauty and bears the amusing tag "Property of the Viceroy" on its traveling case.

Hochman lead on the opening Allegro on a contemporary Steinway with a lively cantabile theme and its delicious plunge into a vortex of virtuoso figuration while leaving deft diminuendo in his wake. The following Larghetto brims with conversational give-and-take on where to take the melody. The livelier concluding Allegretto offers a glimpse of what would become *sturm und drang* with fierce emotional contrast highlighting both stillness, tenderness, and rushing excitement. Mozart's penchant for dramatic, racing triplets empowers the emotion of the concluding movement. While Hochman's piano gently and politely led the first movement and engaged in searching collegial conversation with the violin and cello in the second movement, the piano masterfully dominates the last movement with bravura brilliance. Hochman delivered the intellectual clarity of improvised exploration as he hewed to a confident, outgoing, social thrust.

Clarinet Trio in A minor, Opus 114 (1891) by Johannes Brahms featured Kristyna Petisková on clarinet. Born in Prague in 1995, she has won many international awards and has performed throughout Europe, including playing for Ireland's RTÉ Orchestra. She is now pursuing a degree at Bard College with a second major in Theater Studies. Her performance excelled in subtle, seductive, soft modulations. Inspired by Anton Stadler's virtuoso clarinet playing, Brahms' last four chamber works were devoted to the clarinet.

While this trio is labeled a clarinet trio, it might well have been called a cello trio, so important is the role of the cello in this work wherein the cello opens the door with a high Romantic melody with Hochman's piano replying with a triplet. But it is the liquid dialogue between cello and clarinet that creates the male/female dialectic with contrary impulses that propel the melody forward. The Second movement Adagio turns philosophical and speculative in mood

and despite the density of the music a genial relaxation pervades the intricacies of flirting navigation. The innocent and naïve opening of the clarinet in the Third movement appears to mock Brahms' sardonic wit, yet Brahms turns this sentimental waltz into self-parody, thus freeing himself from commitment to an emotional simplicity that judges innocence to be inferior to the wisdom of age, which Sherry's cello suavely asserted. The descending melodic thirds of the Fourth movement with the piano forcefully intruding provides an air of mysterious resolution: all three instruments appear to deliver a resoundingly curt dismissal of Romanticism as the language of the future.

After intermission dominated by high-flying, streaking, *cirro* clouds that forecast coming rain, Ludwig von Beethoven's unusual 1808 excursion into Gothic was next, the *Piano Trio in D major, Op. 70*, no. 1, nicknamed "Ghost," although the only ghost I can find in the eerie second movement is the haunting claustrophobia of uneasy confinement amid insomniac nightmare. The opening Allegro brims with the satisfaction of a hard day's work being satisfactorily accomplished. The following Largo welcomes the twilight and its insect songs and appears to be ready for the refreshment of sleep which does not arrive. The trial of immobility amid darkness takes a dramatic turn. Matches have been misplaced and can't be found in the dark. There is naught to do but think of melody, yet that does not bear fruit.

Relief finally appears with the first hint of dawn, which the Anglo-Saxons called *utna*, that shadowy, luminescent blue before the sun rises, a time of danger when armies attack or deliver a welcome hue that promises safety. The relieving joy of the reversal occurs—with such welcoming glimmers music can smile. There is even a run of quaintly amusing pizzicato expertly plucked by Kenny on violin. (In general Beethoven despised pizzicato and most often employs it in mocking fashion.) Another day of working with music is here. Long live that day!

And long live the sounds of music on Music Mountain which is now celebrating its 90th season in a convivial atmosphere where one can converse with complete strangers who harbor a love for the warmth and humanity that music provides. Next Sunday afternoon Music Mountain will feature one of the finest string quartets in the country, the Escher Quartet playing a program of Beethoven, Schubert, and Dvorak.

Benjamin Hochman

The Millbrook Independent
VOICE OF THE MILLBROOK REGION

April 28, 2019

MOZART: REFLECTIVE, PRIVATE

By Kevin T. McEneaney

Benjamin Hochman continued his public recital series of Mozart's Piano Sonatas this past Saturday afternoon at Bard's Laszlo Building. Hochman played from memory.

In the prolific spring of 1774 in Salzburg Mozart had performed two-hand piano sonatas with his sister Maria, nicknamed" Nannerl," from whom at the age of four Mozart began to learn piano. Young Mozart often wrote pieces with friends or family in mind. Hochman opened with *Piano Sonata No. 2 in F major, K. 280* (1774). After Salzburg, Mozart travelled without his sister to Munich where he quickly composed six piano sonatas.

The opening *Allegro* dramatizes a dialogue between left and right hand. The left hand appears to query, while the right-hand answers at length; the left hand appears to be male, the right female. The questions of the leftt hand appear to be naïve and innocent while the right-hand answers are cheerfully forthright and instructive. The *Adagio* presents a rather melancholy meditation. My speculation is that Mozart at eighteen recalls his most early days of learning the piano with his older sister; the melancholy strain dramatizes his current separation from her. The delightful concluding *Presto* brims with charm, perhaps remembering happy childhood escapades with his sister. Hochman ably caught that carefree zest and innocent delight of childhood memories.

Piano Sonata No. 10 in C major, K. 330 (1783) presents a much more mature Mozart. Among pianists there is a great variety of interpretation on how to perform this piece, especially the role of recapitulation. Some pianists shorten and some lengthen the work—the opening *Allegro* being anywhere from five to nine minutes; Hochman clocked six minutes. Likewise, performances of the somber *Andante* in F major vary from five to nine minutes; Hochman clocked at six. The concluding *Allegretto* might be from three to five minutes; Hochman clocked at five minutes. In bestowing an aura of more symmetry on this sonata, Hochman created a more classical atmosphere and tighter elegance that offered crystal aesthetic clarity.

After brief break, Hochman played *Adagio for Piano in B minor, K. 540* (1788) where the question of repeats once more occurs. Mozart rarely explores B minor. Here performances vary from amputated five-and-a-half minutes to a languorous twelve minutes; Hochman clocked at ten minutes which allowed for lyric recapitulations without tedium—a sensible performance that avoided excess where the recapitulations are pleasant and light rather than laborious. The recapitulations exuded lively charm.

Piano Sonata No. 15 in F major, K. 533 (1788) concluded the recital. While this work usually clocks at twenty-three minutes, Hochman clocked at twenty-two, which may be perceived as perhaps a rather too austere version. The opening *Allegro* displayed a clean fluidity, yet it was the more meditative with dramatic serenity in the *Andante* (B-flat major) where Hochman most excelled. There was real suspense and deep lyricism without artificiality.

This recital explored Mozart as more introverted and reflective than may be commonly thought as Mozart mostly dwelt in F major and B minor. Hochman clearly caught Mozart's pensive profile as he glanced in the mirror of his soul. Hochman will present the full cycle of Mozart Piano Sonatas at the Israel Conservatory in September.

Benjamin Hochman

The Millbrook Independent
VOICE OF THE MILLBROOK REGION

January 6, 2019

BAROQUE SURPRISE WITH THE SHERMAN ENSEMBLE

By Kevin T. McEneaney

The Sherman Ensemble presented its annual "Best of Baroque" concert this past Saturday at Christ Church in Pawling and St. Andrew's Church in Kent, CT on Sunday afternoon. Every year they offer a thoughtful selection of Baroque programing, yet there was more satisfactory surprise in this year's concert, due to programing and performance.

Opening with J.S. Bach's Sonatina in B minor, BWV 1030, which is more often heard on organ, pianist Benjamin Hochman of Bard College and flutist Susan Rotholz delivered an arrangement that highlighted Rotholz on flute. The piano in the ambitious Andante opening supplied a menu of themes for the flute to choose from and elaborate at length in the succeeding slow Largo e dolce. Having let the flute run lyrical, the piano challenged the flute to accompany its racing pace in the following Presto where Rotholz not only kept the race-course pace but dominated in the climatic stretch. This sparer arrangement delightfully brought Bach's playful humor to the fore.

Handel's Trio Sonata in D minor, HWV 316, was performed next. Here Handel, like Fux or Fasch, composed in four movements (slow-fast-slow-fast) instead of the famous Vivaldi recipe (fast-slow-fast). Handel was inordinately fond of the oboe and noted oboist Gerard Reuter was here to showcase his tempo and sophisticated dynamics but nearly adopted the role of a mystical Pied Piper as he bobbed and weaved with his instrument so that half the audience was temporarily hypnotized while Michael Roth on violin brought the audience back to their lyrical senses. I have heard Rueter on recordings with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra (of which he was a founding member); it was an impressive treat to hear him in person. This lively and youthful dancing spree by Handel nearly raised the audience to its feet. Here Eliot Bailen on cello and Hochman on piano merely had to content themselves with background support, as the violin and oboe alternately lead, yet arrived amicable agreement at the conclusion.

Benjamin Hochman next took to center stage to perform J.S. Bach's French Suite No. 5 in G major, BWV 816, which is usually performed on organ. Here Bach discourses on seven French dances in a display of how these dances can wander into variations, concluding with a celebratory Sunday Gigue brimming with counterpoint: just when the audience might think that this simple primitive dance might be a yawning concluder, Bach fires it up with a marvelous display of fugal counterpoint that it becomes something of a religious transfiguration. I heard organists go through these dance paces and then light up the room with the finale. They usually play the Sarabande (third movement) too quickly in a mechanical fashion to arrive at the more exciting Gavotte more quickly, but Hochman provided a major surprise: he slightly slowed and broke the tempo to conjure a poetic, lyrical interpretation that nearly rivaled the concluding Gigue to which all organists are tempted to race to. While this was a wonderful concert, the

exquisite Saraband was its mountain peak. I was vainly hoping that it might be done once more as an encore, but that was not to be.

Georg Philipp Telemann's Trio in B-flat major, TWV 42 B-1 was next. In the opening Vivace Roth took the lead, while in the following Siciliana Reuter's oboe dominated. Having presented a French and Italian mode of music, Telemann intoned a more balanced ensemble sound where all Germans could play with democratic equality in the Allegro finale where piano and cello (as basso continuo) could more fully contribute to a more sophisticated ensemble sound.

They had intended to conclude with a rather simple and upbeat piece by Vivaldi, yet Rueter had persuaded them to perform an early piece by Johan Friedrich Fasch (1678-1741). This, too, was a major surprise as Fasch is usually considered as a minor footnote in Baroque music, yet Fasch's Sonata for Flute, Oboe, Violin, and Continuo (as piano and cello here) FaWV N:B1 proved otherwise. The opening Largo set out a variety of theme that were explored by the ensemble in the lively Allegro that produced several harmonic highlights, sounds that I've never heard before. After this delicious feast, a joking Grave created such cute suspense that I could not help but smile. The concluding Allegro once more engaged all performers to near-levitating highs as they enjoyed their agreeable unity.

For encore they played a movement from Vivaldi's RV 88. After the concert Bailen confessed that in rehearsal the Vivaldi appeared so simple that Reuter had prevailed in his argument to drop it, saying that the joke about Vivaldi's compositions is STENCIL. There is much truth in that humorous observation, yet there are a few Vivaldi works of great merit.

In this concert The Sherman Ensemble made old Baroque music *new*, which is what real performers do at their peak. Both they and the audience had great fun in the process of hearing music played robustly with deep emotion and lively wit.

Benjamin Hochman

The Millbrook Independent
VOICE OF THE MILLBROOK REGION

October 14, 2018

BENJAMIN HOCHMAN PLAYS MOZART

By Kevin T. McEneaney

A substantial crowd gathered on Sunday afternoon to hear Benjamin Hochman perform a Mozart Recital at Bard College's Lazlo-Bitó Conservatory Building. Why the excitement? Hochman has embarked on a project to perform the complete Piano Sonatas of Mozart over the next twelve moths, which will culminate as a full program to be performed at the Israel Conservatory in September 2019. This was the first preview: four sonatas, early, middle, and late.

Hochman opened with Mozart's *Sonata No. 1 from 1774*. This pleasant early work, glimmering in the shadow of Haydn, displayed more aspiration than achievement—good, well-polished, yet nothing to be really excited about. It announced Hochman as a virtuoso pianist (as it probably did for Mozart).

Sonata No. 17 in B-flat major, K. 570 from 1789 (two years before Mozart's death) was a dazzling heirloom. As one of Mozart's most rounded and accomplished sonatas, it painted a vivid contrast: from the promising pianist, here was a mature work with interesting interstitial texture, which is what Hochman is a master of—those effortless leaping transitions from one mood to another. Hochman caught the mercurial light, effervescence, and humor of the great keyboard master. Many pianists are able to capture the delightful, ambient joy of Mozart, yet few master the subtlety of Mozart's impish, humor in the seemingly-spontaneous varying cadences of his compositions, especially in the apparently casual counterpoint of the finale, which reveals where the witty composition had traveled from and how it arrived on the portal of the ear with such effortless irony.

Sonata No. 11 in A major, K. 331 from 1783 remains perhaps Mozart's most best-known sonata. Opening with theme and variation, the melody undergoes six metamorphic transformations as it foregrounds elaborations. The emotional romanticism of the following *Menuetto* now sounds like a prophecy of later Romanticism; it is so

delightfully seductive that one begins to hold one's breath and enter into an unexpected world. The pseudo-Turkish march motif of the concluding movement with its dynamic gradations was a fashionable style in Paris at the time when and where Mozart wrote it (think Mozart's *A Major Violin Concerto* and his opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio*), and has remained remarkably so to this day, due to it inimitable charm.

Hochman concluded with S*onata No. 8 in A minor, K. 310* from1778, also written in Paris where Mozart arrived in March with his mother, yet its melancholy mood and meditative introspection is often thought to be a recollection of his mother's death in July of that year, shortly after their arrival.

This serious meditation on death retains a brooding, provocative sensibility suitable for offering contrast to the preceding intoxication of the more popular pieces played before it. This had the effect of reminding the audience that Mozart was no mere social entertainer, but a composer deeply in touch with the vagaries of our journey on earth.

Playing from memory, Hochman's playing was clean, nuanced, rolling with spontaneous inflection as he peddled expertly on the Steinway. Hochman will continue this Recital series on February 3, 2019. Perhaps his effort will conclude with a recording that will challenge the 1990 recordings of Philippe Entremont.

Benjamin Hochman

The Millbrook Independent

VOICE OF THE MILLBROOK REGION

September 17, 2018

JOAN TOWER BIRTHDAY BASH AT BARD

By Kevin T. McEneaney

Bard College's Sosnoff Theater provided a program of composer Joan Tower's work to celebrate her 80th birthday. She has lived in nearby Red Hook for the past 48 years. The program showcased an eclectic selection of her work that highlighted Tower's varied musical talent.

The program opened with "Big Sky" (2000), a piano trio with Blair McMillen on piano, Raman Ramakrishnan on cello, and Laurie Smuckler on violin. Piano dominated the first of the three movements, while violin and especially cello dominated the second movement; both movements being rather slow The third movement was the most exciting as all three instruments arrived at a unified crescendo and ultimately a thrilling finale. The program of this piece was the evocation of Tower's childhood in Bolivia when she raced horses. The trio then performed a three-minute related work on the theme of horse-racing, "And ...They're Off" (1997). This fast-paced *jeu d'esprit* conjured the excitement of a horse race, which was commissioned by the Nova Scotia Museum.

"Wing" (1981) was a solo clarinet work performed by Anthony McGill, the principal clarinetist of the New York Philharmonic and Metropolitan Opera. This work was written for Tower's Bard colleague Laura Flax, who recently passed away. This high-flying and looping work with jazzy edges was the highlight thrill of the concert, not only because of its consummate composition—McGill's performance pushed the work into memorable eloquence. The enthralled audience of a few hundred demanded a rapturous second bow from McGill.

"Small Plus" (2018) was written for Sō Percussion. Four players performed on about sixty small percussion instruments. The structure of the work was circular: it ended in the same manner as it began—with the ringing of small meditative bells.

"Up High" (2010) was performed by soprano Dawn Upshaw with Kayo Iwama on piano. This offered variations of the tune "Over the Rainbow" and Leonard Bernstein's "Somewhere."

"Looking Back" (2018) was performed by the Da Capo Chamber Players. Joan Tower had played piano for that chamber group for 13 years. Steven Beck on piano was an energetic replacement and Patricia Spencer excelled on flute, while Chris Gross on cello also delivered a superior performance.

"Steps" (2011, rev. 2017) was a complicated tribute to both Debussy and Tower's former mentor Milton Babbitt, who despised Debussy, whom Tower admired. The piece employs the 12-tone rows favored by Babbitt, yet the style of the work exhibits the liquid fluidity of Debussy's signature; the 12-tone rows endow the work with an edgy, near-dissonant quality that translates Debussy's aesthetic into the 21st century. Benjamin Hochman played with seemingly effortless aplomb as he ran the keys into the bliss of contemporary relevance.

Town Supervisor of Red Hook, Robert McKeon appeared to make a special news announcement: he presented a certificate to Joan Tower proclaiming her birthday, September 16, to be perpetual Joan Tower Music Appreciation Day to be celebrated by the town. This was evidently a surprise announcement.

A flock of singers from Bard's Graduate Vocal Arts program appeared on stage to conclude the concert. They sang "Descending" (2012), a lament for the death of Tower's older sister Ellen who had passed away. "Thank You" (2018) provided a superb example of Tower's playful, somewhat whacky, humor was written for those students who reveled in the humor and accompanying stage antics. The audience then sang "Happy Birthday" to Joan Tower.

Benjamin Hochman

The Millbrook Independent
VOICE OF THE MILLBROOK REGION

February 27, 2017

HOCHMAN CREATES MAGIC AT BARD

By Kevin T. McEneaney

Benjamin Hochman, currently in residence at Bard, began his Monday evening piano recital at Bard's László Z. Bitó Conservatory Building with J.S. Bach's *French Suite in G major*, BWV 816. The first six of the seven movements were played with a later Romantic, lyrical frisson while the concluding *Gigue* of all these dance movements returned to a traditional Baroque interpretation. Hochman possesses an immaculate clarity of fingering and tone, the pressure of hitting the ivories being extraordinarily even and clear, so that each note hangs distinctly in air.

Hochman next selected *Six Little Pieces*, op. 19 by Arnold Schoenberg. I thought this choice unusual, yet I was captivatingly entranced by the mystery of "Langsam" with such mystery that it escalated into exaltation. "Rasch, aber leicht" swirled into such rushing heights that my staid preconceptions about Schoenberg fractured and fragmented.

After the briefest of breaks, Hochman swung into Robert Schumann's 1838 *Kinderszenen*, op. 15, a dozen short pieces about young children with a concluding last word from a poet. These

charming vignettes offer quick-sketch portraits of children's personalities in a classroom. The most-often played is the number "Dreaming" while the final marvelous conceit of a tired child falling asleep from lessons remains the most cyclically periodic before the poet magically resolves the harmony of the first movement in a different (adult) key. Investing each brief piece with a different emotion creates a musical cubism in which emotion remains the lynchpin. Hochman elegantly delved in and out of the angelic angles, painting panoply of emotion. Hochman ran Mozart's *Adagio in B minor*, K. 540, written in 1787, immediately into the Schumann as if it was an epilogue, yet it was foreshadowing precedent.

Hochman turned to Leós Janáček's late *On an Overgrown Path*, rooted in Moravian folk tunes and a modernized Schumannesque technique presented in a meditative manner, plunging the listener into an unfamiliar bucolic and religious landscape. Hochman played three movements from this work: "Our Evenings," "Come With Us!," and "The Madonna of Frydek." The mystery of these pieces made me link back to the Schoenberg pieces previously played.

Updating to the contemporary, Hochman played a short piece, *Breeze of Delight*, by the American composer Peter Lieberson who passed away six years ago. This delightful wind of arpeggios somehow linked back to the Mozart and Schumann.

The recital concluded with the second Allegro movement from Franz Schubert famous *Impromptu in E-flat major*, op. 90. This charming work constructs a *perpetuum mobile* that Hochman tackled with liquid dexterity. It is as if the musician and audience was ensnared in some magical music box. And so we were. With sudden silence reality itself sounded shocking. Enthusiastic applause demanded two bows.

Benjamin Hochman

The Washington Post

February 2, 2014

Pianist Benjamin Hochman explores variations during Kennedy Center debut

By Anne Midgette

When you think of a pianist's Kennedy Center debut, names such as Schubert and Rachmaninoff tend to come to mind. Benjamin Hochman, however, is part of a generation of musicians who are moving past the received wisdom and finding their own ways to approach tradition — much to the gratitude of audiences delighted to hear fresh takes and fresh pieces when they're presented in capable hands.

It's true that Hochman's concert Saturday afternoon at the Kennedy Center Terrace Theater, presented by the Washington Performing Arts Society, included Brahms (the Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel). But the two other classic composers on the program are both alive: Frederic Rzewski and Oliver Knussen. (In what may be a WPAS first, the organization's chief executive and president, Jenny Bilfield, mentioned in her pre-concert remarks that Knussen is coming to town in April for a residency at the Library of Congress. That's the first time in many years that a WPAS leader has plugged another organization's concerts before the curtain, rather than simply highlighting its own.)

The program, too, had a theme beyond simply showcasing a gifted young pianist. It was entirely devoted to variations, from Knussen's seven-minute "Variations for Piano," written for Peter Serkin, to Rzewski's towering, hour-long "The People United Will Never Be Defeated," a contemporary staple since Ursula Oppens gave it its world premiere on another WPAS program back in 1976 — also for the Hayes piano series. (Oppens happens to be coming to the Library of Congress in a couple of weeks, too, which is another concert you should mark on your calendars.)

Variations are a popular form — Hochman called it “primal” in his remarks to the audience — but they’re not necessarily easy to pull off, particularly three sets one after another. They require a particular kind of concentration from performer and listener, following the thread of the theme through a range of permutations, from one extreme to another, showcasing the composer’s ability, the performer’s virtuosity — and, often, a massive journey through a sea of shifting identities until the theme, often, returns, sometimes seeming bare or sandblasted after the odyssey through which it has been, depositing the listener back on the shores of reality. To go through three such journeys in one afternoon is a considerable challenge — more of a challenge, indeed, than Hochman made it seem in his urbane and masterful rendition.

Hochman is clearly a thinking pianist; this was a program with a lot of meat to it. That can be a coded way to indicate “not virtuosic,” but Hochman is very virtuosic, indeed — it’s just that virtuosity seems for him a true byproduct, a means of accessing music that interests him.

That was clear right from the start, when he made the Knussen variations sound easy and simple, flowing up and down the keyboard with a kind of hypnotic facility, even though each is written in a different meter and the music is so complex that the score is sometimes notated over three or four staves instead of the usual two.

“Thinking pianist” can also be code for a cerebral approach, and that isn’t Hochman, either. He excelled at finding the narrative through-line in his long-form variations. His Brahms was colorful and engaging while remaining crisp and clean-cut, the Handelian character overpowering what became, in his hands, at best a thin veneer of romanticism.

But the afternoon’s tour de force was the Rzewski. This piece is a full concert program in itself, moving through a range of styles and emotions, a kaleidoscopic reflection of the Chilean protest song that forms its theme, as much a manifesto as a stylistic exercise. Hochman led the audience through this rugged, majestic landscape with such rhetorical authority that there was no hint of movement among his listeners when he paused between sections. The minute he was done, the audience launched immediately into ovations — not always the norm for a contemporary work.

Benjamin Hochman

SANTA FE REPORTER

July 29, 2014

Getting Dedicated

By John Stege

What more appropriate opening for the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival's 42nd season than Robert Schumann's ecstatic song, "Widmung," ("Dedication") as transcribed for piano by Liszt? Well, frankly, none whatsoever. Just imagine that, glancing at Rückert's text, you substitute "Musik" for "Du," the poet's beloved. It works.

Granted, this dedication happened at the SFCMF's second program, not the grand opening on July 20, but never mind. We all knew what was on pianist Jon Nakamatsu's mind at his noon recital two days later at St. Francis Auditorium. "Widmung" can be sung or played with exalted saccharine pretense. Not here, though. As in the remainder of his all-Schumann program, Nakamatsu's reading was a mixture of balance and elegant restraint, adept at bringing out inner voices and avoiding extravagant gesture.

The composer's youthful dance suite "Papillons" followed, nearly a dozen brief vignettes, all but one in triple-time, meant to evoke the ebullience of a masked ball. Nakamatsu gave each its measure of

lightness and grace, especially in the impish No. 11 and the witty double-speak finale.

"Carnaval" concluded the regular program. Since Schumann loved all things literary, I'll toss in a motto from Edmund Spenser: "Be bold, be bold, be not too bold." That's the Nakamatsu take on Schumann's frisky warhorse: Grand but not grandiose; kind to the work's *grotesqueries* but not grotesque. Chopin's "Fantaisie-Impromptu" in the deftest of readings encored us into the sunshine.

Shostakovich's angst-ridden 1944 Piano Trio No. 2, Op. 67, his bleak testament to the horrors of war, dominated the July 24 program. By then, evidence of Nazi atrocities had become overwhelming, far beyond the power of words to express. So, then, this trio. Its ghostly opening *Andante* is unique—first the cello's icy harmonics, then the lower-voiced violin's entrance followed by the canon's hushed, deliberate third voice, the piano in its lowest register. Can anything be so profoundly sad?

Faster movements display a more familiar side of the composer—brittle, bitter, mocking and furious by turns. The *Largo*, its theme and variations supported by the quietly insistent passacaglia of eight soft, grim chords in the piano, six times repeated, expresses despair mingled with helpless resignation. A finer performance (violinist William Preucil, cellist Mark Kosower, pianist Alessio Bax) would be difficult to imagine.

Works featuring the viola had opened each half of the concert: Poul Ruders' six brief *Romances* and then Brett Dean's *Skizzen für Siegbert* in three movements—"Poem," "Moto perpetuo" and "Lied"—performed by the composer. Dean's final movement, its elegiac intensity and focused stillness in particular, made a profound impression.

Closing the first half: Beethoven's Piano Quartet, Op. 16. Some auditors (me included) prefer the earlier piano and winds version over Beethoven's recasting for piano and strings, especially as heard in this correct, bland reading by violinist Jennifer Frautschi, violist Hsin-Yun Huang, cellist Wilhelmina Smith and pianist Benjamin Hochman.

Who distinguished himself mightily in the summer's first Bach Plus program last Saturday. Hochman offered a challenging triple bill: Luigi Dallapiccola's 1952 *Quaderno Musicale di Annalibera*, sandwiched between two Bach partitas for keyboard. Written as a birthday present for Dallapiccola's 8-year-old daughter, the *Quaderno* consists of 11 not-easy pieces, each the soul of brevity, composed in the 12-tone style the composer favored at the time.

Oddly and no doubt intentionally, many of the miniatures have a distinct tonal or atonal cast. Hochman's effective, non-cerebral reading offered a powerfully pianistic take on the work. His opening, Partita No. 2 BWV 826, has been called by Bach scholar Malcom Boyd, "a graveyard for all but the most nimble-fingered executants." Hochman's swift traversal, buoyant and dynamically pure, left not a corpse behind. The same can be said of his concluding Partita No. 4, BWV 828. The weighty *Allemande* flowed and flowed, and the final *Gigue* exploded in a rapture of excitement.

Bach's introductory note to the six partitas states that they were "composed for music lovers to refresh their spirits." With Hochman in charge, they do and they did.

Benjamin Hochman

The Boston Musical Intelligencer

June 30, 2014

New Pianist + Familiar Quartet = Satisfaction

By Leslie Gerber

The young Israeli-American pianist Benjamin Hochman has been stirring up quite a bit of interest recently. He gave his first performances in the mid-Hudson Valley area on two consecutive days: Saturday evening, June 28th, at Bard College, and Sunday afternoon at Maverick Concerts in Woodstock. With luck we'll be hearing a good deal more of him.

For years I have been complaining about the tonal quality produced by prominent young pianists. For someone with the golden sound of Sviatoslav Richter and Arthur Rubinstein in his memory, the typical sound of successful young pianists isn't satisfying; I describe it as bronze at best, clattery at worst. Radu Lupu, Ivan Moravec, Dubravka Tomsic make beautiful sounds but they are a minority contingent. Recently, some young pianists have brought gold back into my reviewing vocabulary, including Yuja Wang and Jeremy Denk. Hochman is another. At Bard, where he played the three Brahms Violin Sonatas with his wife, violinist Jennifer Koh, Hochman displayed quality and variety of tonal production which were deeply satisfying. (The duo also gave a particularly memorable performance of the Third Sonata.)

At Maverick, Hochman collaborated with the Shanghai Quartet. This was its 24th consecutive appearance in the summer series. Maybe it was the appeal of these players, or maybe just that the audience had been hungry for chamber music since last September, but they drew a particularly large house. The concert opened with Haydn's very familiar Quartet in D Minor, Op. 76, No. 2, frequently known as the "Quinten" (German for Fifths) from its opening motif. This was my kind of Haydn playing, full-throated and powerful, with had lots of vigor and excellent balance. In the Menuetto third movement (actually a Scherzo) the players actually roughened their tone and came down heavily on accents to convey the peasant dance quality. I loved it. Since critics get paid time and a half for finding fault, I could mention that in a few passages first violinist Weigang Li's tone sounded thin. But I really didn't care.

Hochman joined the ensemble for Bright Sheng's *Dance Capriccio,* written in 2011 for the Shanghai Quartet and since performed by them with a number of well-known pianists. The work lasts about 12 minutes, in one continuous movement alternating slow and fast sections. Sheng says the piece is based on Sherpa dance styles, of which I must confess total ignorance. But I can say that he has written an entertaining if not very challenging piece. The performance was very well coordinated and projected the rhythms well.

Sheng's music didn't ask the pianist for great tonal variety, but that is certainly a requirement of Janácek's *In the Mist* for solo piano. Here we could appreciate all of Hochman's virtues: the beautiful sound he produced from the Maverick Yamaha; the strong projection of the sometimes-quirky music; the very wide dynamic range. I haven't thought of velvet in connection with piano sound much in recent years, but that comparison came strongly to mind in this performance.

The program concluded with Dvorák's Piano Quintet in A Major, Op. 81 (actually his second, but almost nobody plays the first). This is one of those pieces that I love dearly but find myself getting a little tired of. Well, not this time! The opening theme was stated with such relaxed rhythm that my reluctance melted right away, and I was swept into Dvorák's world with glee. Beautiful sound was only one attribute of this glorious performance, and again, when more roughness of sound was appropriate (in the Scherzo and parts of the finale), the musicians were not afraid of it. This performance was probably put together in a couple of weekend rehearsals, like typical summer festival collaborations. I know that Hochman and the Shanghais had not performed together before. But the concert sounded as confident and mutual in purpose as though they had a long history together. And as if to show how quickly they can put things together, the combined performers topped off a long program with an encore, the Scherzo of Schumann's Piano Quintet, at a dizzying tempo. I hope they all come back next summer to play the whole thing.

Benjamin Hochman

The New York Times

May 12, 2013

A Card Game at Lunchtime

Jaime Laredo Gives Violin Concert at the 92nd Street Y

By Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim

It was raining cats and dogs last Thursday at noon when audience members filed into the Kaufmann Concert Hall at the 92nd Street Y, spreading the odor of wet coats and umbrellas. It was the lunchtime performance of the final run of chamber-music concerts presented and, in part, performed by the violinist Jaime Laredo with a program encompassing works by Dvorak, Brahms and Franck. The auditorium was divided into two camps. In the front half, the musically literate, as evidenced by the significant number of musical scores spread out on laps. In the back, 150 high school students. For the former, chamber music was a necessity on par with a well-brewed cup of coffee; for the latter, a novelty.

It was a measure of the quality of the excellent playing that both groups quickly fell under the spell of the music with a common sense of complete absorption.

The program opened with four Miniatures for Two Violins and Viola by Dvorak, written as a kind of musical equivalent of a game of cards for the composer, a violinist in the orchestra of the National Theater in Prague, and a pupil of his. Mr. Laredo, the violinist Susie Park and the violist Ida Kavafian played the opening Cavatina with such sweetness that the scruffy earthiness with which they tore into the following Capriccio came as a surprise.

In Brahms's Trio for Piano, Clarinet and Cello in A minor, much of the pleasure came from the contrast between the cool luster of Sharon Robinson's cello and the expansive warmth of David Shifrin's clarinet. On the piano they were joined by Benjamin Hochman — stepping in for André Watts, sidelined by tendinitis — whose sensitive playing produced beads of frosted glass in the Adagio and a muscular, impatient drive in the final Allegro.

In Franck's Quintet for Piano and Strings in F minor, Mr. Hochman took control of the breathless opening movement of this fervently charged masterpiece of Romantic chamber music. The performers gave it an exciting, but never histrionic, rendition that was alert to the quick and fleeting changes in dynamics. In the ever-rotating assignment of lead roles, players asserted themselves and melted back into the background with beautiful swiftness and musical instinct. But it was always the music that took center stage and that, in the midst of a wet and hectic Manhattan day, commanded attention.

Benjamin Hochman

The New York Times

May 21, 2013

That Corner Spot? It's Perfect for a Concert

By Steve Smith

Daryl Freedman, a mezzo-soprano, singing during a Tertulia event at Harding's in Manhattan.

Harding's, a cozy Flatiron district restaurant handsomely appointed in Americana and offering an inventive menu to match, was abuzz on Sunday evening, its dining room filled with the lively sound of customers mingling over glasses of wine. At 20 minutes after 8, a hostess tapped a glass for attention as a pianist, a violinist and a cellist settled into a corner niche to perform.

What followed was the finale from Ives's Piano Trio, a 1911 work brimming with nostalgia and rustic tunes, including the traditional hymn "Rock of Ages." The performers — the pianist Benjamin Hochman, the violinist Lily Francis and the cellist Michael Haas — offered a warm, robust account. The audience, which included couples of all ages, as well as families with small children, listened raptly and responded effusively.

The event was part of an occasional series of concerts called Tertulia, the name a Spanish term signifying a social

gathering with an artistic bent. Founded in 2011 by Julia Villagra — the artistic director and host — this series aims to make classical chamber music accessible and appealing to new audiences.

Ms. Villagra, a former violinist and vocalist now engaged in recruiting and human resources for a trading firm, initially set out to create a series attractive to her peers and co-workers, expanding slowly from there. Her quest, of course, is shared by practically every presenter of classical music nowadays. Those who have ever wrung their hands at the challenge of luring the young and the restless to the charms of chamber music would do well to observe her approach, rooted in equal respect for all of the participants in her events.

The Tertulia (as Ms. Villagra refers to each concert) on Sunday was her first at Harding's, following previous events at various Greenwich Village restaurants and one Upper East Side location. Dinner and sponsor tickets, from $60 to $100, included an appealing prix fixe menu — here, an appetizer, an entree and a dessert — with beverages charged à la carte. (For the record, I paid for my admission and meal.) Without dinner, admission cost $25.

Each composition on the program is represented by just a movement or two — a choice that could make purists scoff, but intended to keep the evening's pace manageable and lively. (Between pieces Ms. Villagra encouraged the audience to seek out complete recordings.) The concert program included approachable, insightful notes, as well as succinct tips in basic concert etiquette. Notably, the idea of proper and improper times for applause was dispensed with.

Dining room service is suspended during Tertulia performances; now and then you saw waiters gently shushing one another. After Ives came dinner, followed by the musical main course: roughly half of Alan Louis Smith's "Covered Wagon Woman," a stylistically conservative yet sophisticated 2007 song cycle based on a frontier diary. Daryl Freedman, a mezzo-soprano, performed with profuse charisma and admirable precision, earning a loud, long ovation.

After dessert came the final musical offering, the last two movements of Dvorak's String Quintet in E flat. Ms. Villagra's programming savvy was evident; the Larghetto, a hymnlike theme followed by frolicsome variations, could hardly have been more inviting to a nonspecialist audience, while the playing was enough to reacquaint any connoisseur of Dvorak's abundant charms.

Benjamin Hochman

The Boston Globe

February 19, 2013

Rising classical stars warm to Schubert cycle

By Harlow Robinson

Winter and the moody, contemplative music of Franz Schubert go well together. One of his best-known vocal works is titled "Winterreise'' — "A Winter Journey.'' And a winter journey is exactly what audience members had to undertake to get to the recital of music by Schubert for piano and voice at the Gardner Museum recital hall on a snowy, arctic Sunday afternoon.

But it was not "Winterreise'' that the hardy and heavily booted band of listeners came to hear. Instead, two young rising stars on the classical music scene, baritone Randall Scarlata and pianist Benjamin Hochman, offered an elegant, polished, and heartfelt performance of another, somewhat less familiar song cycle by Schubert, "Schwanengesang'' ("Swan Song''). Completing the all-Schubert program was the imposing piano Sonata No. 17 in D Major, D. 850, performed by Hochman from memory with fluid style and disarming natural grace.

Schubert (1797-1828) wrote the 14 songs set to poems by three poets (Ludwig Rellstab, Heinrich Heine, and Johann Gabriel Seidl) that constitute the "Swan Song'' cycle in the last year of his brief life. After Schubert's death, a publisher put the songs together in a cycle, as a marketing ploy. As Scarlata explained to the audience, Schubert likely thought of the six Heine settings as a separate mini-cycle. Because the published version of "Swan Song'' changed the intended sequence of the poems, Scarlata restored the original order, which makes much more dramatic and musical sense.

To his carefully paced and impassioned performance, sung mostly from memory, Scarlata brought impressive diction and an obvious understanding of the nuances of the German language. He also took full advantage of the unique possibilities of the Gardner's recital hall, addressing all four sides and all levels of the open space in what felt like an intimate conversation with a storyteller.

Scarlata has the technique and interpretative skills to negotiate Schubert's fleet contrasts — the constant interplay of light and dark, moving suddenly from carefree joy to blackest despair —without exaggeration or strain. Blooming in the lower range, his voice is particularly effective for such songs as "Atlas,'' "Resting Place,'' and the penultimate "The Ghostly Double,'' a scary portrait of obsessive romantic attraction and schizophrenia.

Although Scarlata and Hochman were performing "Swan Song'' together for the first time, they seemed completely at ease as a team. Both as a sensitive accompanist (supportive, never obtrusive) and as soloist in the opening Sonata, Hochman penetrated to the rustic heart of Schubert's turbulent emotional world.

Benjamin Hochman

The Boston Musical Intelligencer

February 19, 2013

Making Round the Cube

By Tamar Hestrin Grader

In the afternoon of February 17th, the Sunday Concert Series at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum presented Schubert: the Sonata in D Major (D. 850) and *Schwanengesang*. Benjamin Hochman (piano) played the sonata with both great fidelity to the score and great rhythmic and expressive freedom. The second movement, with its sweetly halting phrases and complicated syncopations, was particularly lovely. His grace and precision of touch were equally well suited to the wit and jokes of the *Scherzo*, as well as to the twirling variations of the final *Rondo.* At the risk of sounding like the earliest reviewers of Chopin's performances in Vienna, I will mention that his *fortes* were not actually loud—I had the impression that he was more interested in cultivating a delicate, whispering *pp* than a mighty *ff*.

After a brief pause, Hochman returned to the piano with Randall Scarlata (baritone). Before beginning the cycle, Scarlata addressed the audience. Among other things he mentioned his interest in performing lieder for the first time in the round, and that he would enjoy experimenting theatrically with the unusual space of the Gardner Museum's Calderwood Hall. He also discussed the structural peculiarities of *Schwanengesang*.

Unlike *Winterreise* and *Die Schöne Müllerin*, Schubert's earlier song cycles, the lyrics of *Schwanengesang* were taken from the works of three different poets. Much, indeed, of what we know as *Schwanengesang* (including the title) was the invention of the publisher as he attempted to put together enough unrelated material after Schubert died to cash in on the popularity of the earlier song cycles. Thus, the cycle includes seven poems of Rellstab's, six of Heine's, and one by Seidl (the final song, "Die Taubenpost" was rumored to have been the last song Schubert composed). There is some evidence that Schubert may have intended to make a full cycle out of the works of Heine, but, if so, he seems never to have completed it (these being his only settings of that poet).

Curiously, Schubert copied the songs in a different order from Heine's original sequence, and the manuscript order was retained in the publication, as well as in most performances to this day. Hochman and Scarlata, however, chose to restore Heine's order, so the second half of the cycle went not in the familiar order of

"Der Atlas"
"Ihr Bild"
"Das Fischermädchen"
"Die Stadt"
"Am Meer"
"Der Doppelgänger"

but rather

"Der Atlas"
"Das Fischermädchen"
"Am Meer"
"Die Stadt"

“Ihr Bild”
“Der Doppelgänger”

The close juxtaposition of the two ghostliest songs of the set, “Ihr Bild,” in which a portrait of the beloved comes to life, with “Der Doppelgänger,” in which the singer sees his ill-omened and grief-stricken double in the moonlight, was very striking indeed.

Scarlata’s smooth voice and impeccable enunciation paired well with Hochman’s delicacy. The resonant low notes of “In der Ferne” were very satisfyingly sung. The appropriately un-nerving colors of “Der Doppelganger” made the hair on the back of my neck stand up. And Scarlata did indeed project in the round, as he promised, moving and rotating with the dramatic turns of the music so that no audience member remained neglected for long. Combining this solution to the distribution of the audience with his expressivity, he successfully reached the prodigious height of the hall and of Schubert’s Art. In the midst of the blowing snow and darkening slush that has been plaguing Boston streets, this concert was an intimate delight.

Benjamin Hochman

Chicago Tribune

June 1, 2012

CSO injects mystical taste of the divine into piano festival

By John von Rhein

Conductor Ludovic Morlot (Chris Sweda, Chicago Tribune / June 1, 2012)

As one takes stock of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association's "Keys to the City" at roughly the midpoint of the piano festival, it becomes clear that while unusual combinations of artists and repertory have been offered, audiences have been given very little in the way of 20th and 21st century music they haven't heard before.

A welcome exception is the weekend CSO subscription program under Ludovic Morlot's direction, which combines standard musical evocations of Spain with a French modernist masterpiece from the last century, Olivier Messiaen's "Trois petites liturgies de la Presence Divine." The work entered the orchestra's repertory for the first time at Thursday night's concert, a curiously belated local premiere for a score dating from 1944, written in occupied Paris but not premiered until after the liberation.

One doesn't have to share the composer's idiosyncratic Roman Catholic mysticism to appreciate what makes the "Three Short Liturgies on the Divine Presence" one of his best and most unassuming pieces.

Messiaen created his own devotional poetry from passages in the holy scriptures, setting his texts to music that seeks a kind of ecstatic timelessness. Woven around the words (sung by a chorus of women's voices) is an unusual

instrumental fabric that draws on the composer's trademark birdcalls, Javanese and Balinese gamelan rhythms and sonorities, and the eerie wail of the electronic instrument known as the ondes martenot. The score, Messiaen wrote, "is, above all, music of colors."

Morlot certainly knows his way around Messiaen's music and he did a worthy job of organizing and clarifying the overlapping rhythmic and harmonic layers. The irregular rhythms and meters of the second liturgy were sharply drawn, while the 52 women's voices, drawn from the Chicago Symphony Chorus, gave a shimmering accounting of the half-sung, half-chanted choral part, despite somewhat cloudy French vowels. Capturing the music's spiritual resonances, to the extent one can hear in recordings made under the composer's supervision, proved more elusive.

Daniel Schlosberg played the daunting piano part splendidly, and the chamber orchestra, especially the hard-working percussion players, rose to the challenges of their kaleidoscopic parts. The crucial ondes martenot part (played by Cynthia Millar) was relegated to the background and not always audible. One came away with the sense of good musicians on top of the notes but not yet fully inside what they signify.

From evocations of the divine, Morlot turned to evocations of the Spanish landscape and Spanish dance, in the form of Falla's "Nights in the Gardens of Spain" and Ravel's "Rapsodie Espagnole."

It's often said that Ravel, a Frenchman, wrote the best Spanish music, but Falla, in his best-known orchestral work, did so sumptuously with his impressionist triptych for piano and orchestra. Morlot brought a nice combination of coloristic fantasy and rhythmic elan to the piece, qualities underscored by the incisive and idiomatic Stewart Goodyear, playing the obbligato keyboard part. Ravel's colorful tour of Spanish dances came off with castanet-clicking gusto.

The program will be repeated at 8 p.m. Saturday and 7:30 p.m. Tuesday at Symphony Center, 220 S.Michigan Ave.; $29-$209; 312-294-3000, cso.org.

Some other "Keys to the City" musings

Festival curator Emanuel Ax and CSO creative director Gerard McBurney, who hosted a Tuesday night event billed as "Evolution of the Piano Concerto," must have realized they were attempting the impossible. How can you meaningfully compress so vast a subject into an hour-long primer illustrated with bits and pieces from 15 mostly standard concertos? Why should anyone want to?

Perhaps realizing the futility of the task, Ax and McBurney bantered and vamped when they weren't fielding irrelevant, elementary questions from co-host Terri Hemmert of WXRT-FM. The assisting pianists, Benjamin Hochman and Orion Weiss, wore their best game faces and played ably, as did the youthful Civic Orchestra of Chicago players under Mei-Ann Chen. They all deserved better. I wonder how many audience members left the hall more enlightened than when they came in.

Much more rewarding was Wednesday's program of works for two pianos, which brought Ax back to Orchestra Hall for his final appearance of the festival, sharing the stage with Hochman, Weiss and longtime CSO pianist Mary Sauer.

The program was made up of pieces better known in their orchestral guises, all but one of which (Brahms' "Variations on a Theme by Haydn") the CSO is performing as part of the festival. It was good to hear the Brahms "Haydn" Variations in its two-keyboard guise, which the composer considered not a transcription but a fully independent work. The performance by Ax and Weiss, classical in outlook, was admirably balanced and synchronized.

Sauer joined Ax to present four pieces by Carl Maria von Weber that Paul Hindemith used as the basis for his "Symphonic Metamorphosis of Themes by Weber," which David Robertson conducted here last week. This seldom-heard music for piano duet (played here on two keyboards) feels quite innocent in its original form, divorced from Hindemith's contrapuntal and harmonic elaborations.

While Ravel's "La Valse" and Rachmaninov's "Symphonic Dances" surrender too much of their rich color and sonority when translated from the orchestra to twin keyboards, the gain in textural clarity makes the alternative versions worth an occasional hearing.

The Ravel found Weiss and Hochman sensitively attuned to each other's rhythmic subtlety as well as to the music's elegant if ominous undertow as it waltzes into oblivion. The Rachmaninov was not lacking in freewheeling sweep and rhythmic bite, but balances were off just often enough to be bothersome. Never mind: Weiss in particular is a major talent Chicago needs to hear more of.

Benjamin Hochman

The New York Times
THE Arts

October 28, 2009
by Anthony Tommasini

Music Review | Benjamin Hochman

A Lunchtime Break, Complete With Food for Thought

The premise of Columbia University's free Lunchtime Concerts, presented at Philosophy Hall, an intimate reading room ideal for chamber music, is that only one work should be played per program.

On Monday, for the first installment of the pianist Benjamin Hochman's survey of Bach's six solo keyboard partitas, that work was quite short: the Partita No. 1 in B flat, which lasted just 16 minutes in an elegant, flowing performance.

Even preceded by Mr. Hochman's insightful spoken analysis of the piece, with excerpts, the program took only 30 minutes. Some people had waited twice that long to claim a

seat. Including standees, Philosophy Hall can accommodate only 180 or so.

Judging from the rapt attention of the audience during Mr. Hochman's performance and the prolonged ovation, no one felt short-changed by the program (the first of three on consecutive days). The idea is for people to take a midday break, gather in a cozy space and focus on hearing a single work.

The First Partita, the shortest, is "sunny, open and innocent," as Mr. Hochman, a 29-year-old Israeli, explained. Yet the music has "flecks of darkness and complexity," he added. Though hearing just this piece allowed the audience to experience those aspects of the work, Mr. Hochman's sensitive performance also compelled you to listen. In his comments he was soft-spoken and intelligent, and those qualities characterized the playing of this gifted, fast-rising artist as well.

Many pianists try to evoke some of the detached prickly tone of a harpsichord when they play Bach's keyboard works on the piano. Not Mr. Hochman. His sound was lovely, rounded and warm. He played with refined legato, smooth phrasing and generous, though never blurry, pedal.

The opening Praeludium, a graciously ornamented theme, which, as Mr. Hochman explained, simply embellishes the rising notes of the major scale, emerged in a calm, unforced pace.

In the Allemande and Corrente movements, Mr. Hochman maintained graceful tempos that were never rushed, allowing him to highlight quirky inner voices and contrapuntal details. There was lyrical poise in the Sarabande, gentle humor in the Menuets and impressive clarity in his fleet Gigue.

Following tradition, Mr. Hochman lingered afterward to speak with his grateful listeners; many promised to return.

Benjamin Hochman

Sequenza 21/
The Contemporary Classical Music Community

February 20, 2012

SOLO RECITAL: Benjamin Hochman

By Lawrence Dillon

Benjamin Hochman gave a recital here on Thursday night that was as lovely an argument for substance over flash as one could wish for. It also featured a very enjoyable balance the familiar and the unfamiliar.

Familiar: a Schubert sonata and Brahms fantasies I slapped my way through many years ago.

Unfamiliar: Bartók *Eight Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs* and Widmann*Idyll und Abgrund: Six Schubert Reminiscences*. The former pulled the handsome trick of sounding like Bartók without sounding quite like any Bartók I had ever heard before. Completed in 1920, the *Improvisations* evince a familiarity with the composer's pre-12-tone Viennese peers, especially in their aphoristic discourse and elusive cadences. And yet, there are the Hungarian peasant tunes, exerting their modal influence over the expressionistic contours.

The Widmann took attractive Schubert figures and surrounded them with delicate clusters and brutal outbursts, alternately caressing and abusing the source material in a way that was, for this listener, captivating. Jorg Widmann, in addition to being a composer, is apparently an accomplished clarinetist, with an uncanny grasp of the piano's expressive capabilities.

The Bartók and the Widmann shared a sensitivity to the resonance older musics can have for later ages, as well as a nice mastery of the miniature.

Meanwhile, Hochman. First, a disclaimer: Benjamin has recorded my piano quartet, so he is a colleague, not a stranger. Not that we go way back, but at least we go back as far as the beginning of this decade. Now for the gushing: the guy is a major artist. As I said at the top, this was substance over flash, poetry over spectacle. The performance of the Schubert Sonata was that of a pianist giving his all for every note, yet always holding something back, a balancing act that seems particularly appropriate for Schubert. The performance was never about timbre, but the range of colors he brought to bear on this piece, on the whole evening, was phenomenal.

So, yeah, he is a colleague – but I am also a fan.

Benjamin Hochman

OpusColorado
News and reviews of music in the Rocky Mountains

January 16, 2012

The Boulder Philharmonic and Benjamin Hochman are stunning!

By Robin McNeil

Saturday, January 14, was a most unusual day. I was able to attend two outstanding concerts: the Boulder Philharmonic Orchestra with Benjamin Hochman, piano, and the Peak Performances Chamber Series. It was also unusual when I considered how many truly remarkable performances I have been able to attend this concert season. I don't recall any particular year where there have been so many fine performances by so many fine organizations.

The Boulder Philharmonic Orchestra concert was simply beyond compare from at least two standpoints: 1) the programming was absolutely brilliant: Satie, Hanson, Ravel, and Gershwin. 2) The performance itself, the ability of the orchestra, and the brilliant performance of Benjamin Hochman, were magnificent.

The Boulder Phil began their program with two of the *Gymnopédies, Nr. 1* and *Nr. 3*, by the French composer, Eric Satie (1866-1925). Eric Satie was born into a good family, but in spite of his wealth, he embraced poverty as the price of admission into artistic freedom. There is a wonderful portrait of Satie which was painted in 1891 by Santiago Rusiñol. It shows the young composer in his apartment in the Montmartre section of Paris, sitting before his fireplace, lost in thought. To me, it seems to show his loneliness, in spite of his friendship with so many artists, and especially that of Claude Debussy. In fact, it was Debussy who orchestrated the two *Gymnopédies* performed on the evening's program, and he did so with the full approval of Eric Satie. However, many of his friends described Satie as being rather odd, and even inaccessible. As stated in the program notes, this oddness of personality was manifested by the directions that he would give in his scores, for example, "like a nightingale with a toothache." That may seem unusual to us today, but isn't it only a tiny bit more extreme than Robert Schumann's instructions for the performer known as "eye music," where he wrote accents over a series of tied notes, or wrote, "The sound of the carnival fades into the distance?"

The Boulder Philharmonic performed Satie's two *Gymnopédies* beautifully. Maestro Butterman certainly allowed the music to express itself in its simplicity and remarkable melodic lines. It was limpid and fluid and it also demonstrated Debussy's skill at orchestration. It reflected Satie's adherence to the aesthetics of Les Six, the group of French composers who

aspired to more “simple” music when compared to that of Richard Wagner.

The second work on the program was by the American composer Howard Hanson (1896-1981). Hanson was born in Wahoo, Nebraska of Nordic parents, and never really absorbed the American-influenced sounds that typified other American composers of the 20th century. In fact, he often admitted that he was strongly affected by the music of Sibelius. After obtaining a degree from Northwestern University in 1916, he became the first American composer to win the Prix de Rome, which gave him the opportunity to study with the Italian composer, Ottorino Respighi. When he returned to the United States, he was appointed head of the Eastman School of Music, which he had helped found.

Hanson’s *Symphony Nr. 2,* is without a doubt, Hanson’s best known work. There is no question that in this work, there is much influence, as Hanson himself admitted, from the *Fifth Symphony* by Jean Sibelius. It contains a great deal of dramatic tension and orchestral weight. In addition, this symphony is, as the program notes point out, cyclical. The same theme occurs in each of the symphony’s movements, and this adds to the remarkable accessibility of this work, aside from the incredible lyricism with its long and arching shapes.

The opening of this work is really quite dark in mood, and there is enough dissonance, that one has the feeling of listening to something that is both new and old. The woodwind section throughout this entire work was absolutely excellent, but I must say that as Butterman swept the first movement along on its path, it was very clear that there is not one weak section in this entire orchestra. The Boulder Philharmonic Orchestras is so successful because they are so well-balanced in ability. This was the second concert I had heard on this day, and it almost seems miraculous that both performances, one a chamber group and the other a full orchestra, were so well conceived and shaped. There is much brass work in all three movements of the Symphony, but in the second movement, they were exceptional. Maestro Butterman was very committed to achieving the rich and full sound that Hanson demands from the orchestra. Before the performance of this work began, Butterman said that in some respects, this Symphony was similar to a movie theme waiting for the movie to come along, and compared it to the writing of John Williams, who has written so many movie scores. While I can certainly understand Maestro Butterman’s point, I do think that Howard Hanson is a better musician and composer, and I assure you, I do not wish to take anything away from John Williams’ ability.

The third movement of this symphony seems to have a few references to Stravinsky in it, with its ostinato and strong percussion. The lush melody, which makes this symphony cyclical, returns and ends the symphony by refreshing everyone’s ear. The string section, the cellos in particular, were most noticeable in their warm tone and provided a genuine sense of reconciliation at the end of the work. The performance of Howard Hanson’s *Symphony Nr. 2* on this program was a genuine surprise, and provided a wonderful contrast with the other works on the program. Hanson may not be ensconced on Mount Parnassus at the same level as Beethoven or Mahler or Bruckner, but he is a composer that deserves a position there, and also deserves to be heard on a more regular basis.

After the intermission, the pianist, Benjamin Hochman, joined the orchestra and performed Ravel’s *Piano Concerto in G Major*.

I will quote from the bio statement on his website:

"Born in Jerusalem, Benjamin Hochman began his studies with Esther Narkiss at the Conservatory of the Rubin Academy in Jerusalem and Emanuel Krasovsky in Tel Aviv. He is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music and the Mannes College of Music where his principal teachers were Claude Frank and Richard Goode. Mr. Hochman's studies were supported by the America-Israel Cultural Foundation and he is an Associate Professor of Piano at East Carolina University. Benjamin Hochman is a Steinway Artist and lives in New York City with his wife, violinist Jennifer Koh.

"Winner of 2011's prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant, Pianist Benjamin Hochman has achieved widespread acclaim for his effortless and thoughtful performances as an accomplished orchestral soloist, recitalist and chamber musician. After his successful recital debut at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, he became a strong musical presence in New York through his concerts with the New York Philharmonic and the American Symphony Orchestra, his Carnegie Hall debut with the Israel Philharmonic and appearances at the 92nd Street Y. Mr. Hochman has performed with the Chicago, Pittsburgh, American, Cincinnati. Houston Symphony and Istanbul State Orchestras, the Seattle, San Francisco, Vancouver, New Jersey and Portland Symphonies, the New York String Orchestra, Prague Philharmonia and the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Canada under eminent conductors such as Kazuyoshi Akiyama, Leon Botstein, Nir Kabaretti, Jaime Laredo, Jun Märkl, Daniel Meyer, Arthur Post, Lucas Richman, Bramwell Tovey, Kaspar Zehnder and Pinchas Zukerman. He has appeared in his native Israel with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, Tel Aviv Soloists, the Raanana and Jerusalem Symphonies, and has joined conductor Pinchas Zukerman and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in a Mozart Piano Concerto project with Hubbard Street Dance Chicago.

"Past festival highlights include Ravinia, Caramoor, Marlboro, Santa Fe, Bard, Bridgehampton, Gilmore, Vail, An Appalachian Summer and Vancouver in North America, as well as international festivals such as Lucerne, Spoleto, Verbier, Ruhr, and Prussia Cove. Mr. Hochman has performed internationally at such major halls as the Concertgebouw, the Louvre, Tivoli Theatre, l'Auditori de Barcelona, Suntory Hall in Tokyo and Kumho Art Hall in Seoul. A masterful collaborator, Benjamin Hochman has worked with the Tokyo, Mendelssohn, Casals, Prazak and Daedalus Quartets, the Zukerman ChamberPlayers, members of the Guarneri and Orion Quartets, Miklós Perényi, Ralph Kirshbaum, Jaime Laredo, Sharon Robinson, Cho-Liang Lin and Ani Kavafian. As a dedicated advocate for contemporary music, he has performed works by Kurtág, Carter, Lutoslowski, and Andriessen, and has worked closely with such notable composers as Krzysztof Penderecki, Philippe Hurel, Osvaldo Golijov and Tania Leon, among others."

After hearing Benjamin Hochman perform the Ravel, it should be obvious to anyone in the audience that all of us heard a world-class pianist. What was so startling about his performance was the ease with which he played. In order to be accurate, which he was, and in order to shape the phrases the way the composer wishes at the tempo the composer demands, one has to be totally relaxed physically and mentally. Every performer, whether a violinist, a singer, or a pianist, becomes nervous immediately before they enter the stage. But, after they begin to perform, and after the first few measures of the piece, they must know it so well mentally, and

be so competent physically, that they can relax and enjoy making the music. You must understand, that the reason one becomes a performing artist, is because there is joy in it, and so many people who are not performing musicians seem to miss this point. Benjamin Hochman is one of the most relaxed pianists that I have seen in several years. He was totally at ease and able to concentrate totally on the job that he enjoys so much. He plays so unbelievably well, there is no need to make the extravagant motions that some pianists make, as if they are saying, "Look how I lifted my hand from the keyboard. Isn't that terribly expressive and indicative of my great sensitivity?" Hochman simply sits down at the piano, and through the music, shows us what a remarkable artist he is and how remarkable the music is.

His reliable musicianship (And even that seems silly to say. If he was not reliable, he wouldn't be where he is) obviously made it much easier for Maestro Butterman to make music as well, and I was under the distinct impression that they truly enjoyed working together. And of course every performance is much easier if there is mutual respect.

The tempos taken were absolutely perfect: full of energy and drive. Ravel often said that the piano was his favorite instrument and it certainly shows in this composition, for he uses the piano's expressive ability to the fullest potential. In addition, the orchestration of the piece, which is remarkable, supports everything that the piano executes. But it was Hochman's relaxation that made his performance look so easy and sound so absolutely marvelous. His hands and arms never once became rigid or tense, and mentally, he was absolutely beyond compare.

I hope there were some aspiring pianists in the audience who could recognize why his playing is so artistically perfect. It will certainly give them something to strive for, and at the same time, give them the awareness that their goal is entirely realistic.

Following the Ravel, the Boulder Philharmonic Orchestra performed George Gershwin's*American in Paris*. For whatever reason, when I was an undergraduate student (and that was in the late 50s and early 60s), no one seemed to understand that Ravel and Gershwin knew each other, even though it was admitted that they influenced each other a great deal. Everyone expressed the knowledge that they had their pictures taken together, but scholars always said that they never really met. I studied with a man, Walter Bricht, who was a close friend of Ravel's, and he told me that he saw Gershwin at Ravel's house. I wrote about that and posted the article on April 6, 2011. If you just go to the archives listed the left-hand side of this page and click on April 2011, you can find the article. At any rate, it was a great relief to hear Maestro Butterman state that they certainly did know each other, and that they compared each other's scores, for there is much more in their compositions than just casual influence.

American in Paris needs no introduction whatsoever, and really, George Gershwin doesn't either. But I will say that George Gershwin still remains a remarkably underrated composer. The performance of this remarkable tone poem, and it is a tone poem because it was inspired by extra-musical considerations, was absolutely marvelous. Yes, there is much American jazz influence in this work as well, with its 9th, 11th, and 13th chords, but Gershwin also said, that aside from the Ravel influence, that he was also inspired by Claude Debussy. But I must say, that if Paris is known by its nickname, The City of Lights, then this performance certainly reflected that image.

The performance of the Boulder Philharmonic Orchestra, and the performance of Benjamin Hochman, plus the ability of the Boulder Phil to invite such an artist, underscores a fact that needs to be clearly stated: the State of Colorado has two major orchestras: the Colorado Symphony Orchestra in Denver, and the Boulder Philharmonic Orchestra.

Benjamin Hochman
BANGOR DAILY NEWS

November 1, 2011

All-Beethoven bill brings beauty to Bangor Symphony Orchestra

By Emily Burnham

If anyone needed additional proof that version 2.0 of the Bangor Symphony Orchestra has arrived, one would need to look no further than Sunday afternoon's concert at the Collins Center for the Arts. The energy and dynamism required to tackle an entire program of Beethoven was more than present — it filled the hall.

It has been said already, but it becomes more apparent with each passing concert — Maestro Lucas Richman has had an incredibly positive effect on the BSO. Where a few years ago a performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony might have had some muddy spots and less-than-ideal dynamics, the BSO's performance of it Sunday was nothing short of thrilling. The Fifth is one of the most well-known compositions of all time, and it's a tough beast to tackle — anyone with even a passing knowledge of classical music knows it, so it's up to the orchestra to show an audience it's got what it takes to pull it off.

Richman coaxed both fiery passion (the first movement) and luxurious warmth (the second movement) from the orchestra, relying much more on the quickness and lightness of strings and woodwinds than on weighty Sturm und Drang. The exhilarating finale brought the audience to its feet. The Fifth is a treat that is brought out sparingly — the last time the BSO performed it was in 2001 — and those in attendance Sunday knew they were hearing something special.

Soloist Benjamin Hochman performed Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 during the first half of the concert. The first movement of the piece gives a few moments to the orchestra before introducing the piano — Hochman entered with a completely solo passage, a delicate and free-flowing exposition of the themes of the orchestra introduction. When the orchestra re-entered, Hochman and the symphony engage each other in a dynamic duel, which occurs again later in the second movement, on a different theme. Hochman and the BSO seemed to work well together, with a lively conversation occurring at different points throughout the concerto. Hochman is a thoughtful, fluid, very clean pianist, and his seemingly effortless reading of the Concerto No. 3 made for an incredibly satisfying concert, overall. It was wonderful to hear such precise yet graceful interpretations of Beethoven.

Benjamin Hochman

CVNC
AN ONLINE ARTS JOURNAL IN NORTH CAROLINA

September 17, 2011

ECU Symphony with Hochman Reaches New Level

By Steve Row

Before an unusually large audience in Wright Auditorium, the East Carolina University Symphony Orchestra demonstrated fully that it is more than just a student ensemble. Over the past two to three years, the group of performers and caliber of performances have been on an upward trajectory, and the opening concert of the 2011-12 Season was highlighted by an ensemble that showed considerable musical skill from start to finish. And when joined by an outstanding soloist, this became a program to savor.

Subtitled "Deuces," the program consisted of two works written in the first two years of the 20th century: Jean Sibelius' Symphony No. 2 in D, Op. 43 (1902), and Sergei Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 in C-minor, Op. 18 (1901), with ECU keyboard faculty member Benjamin Hochman as soloist. While nearly everyone knows the concerto, not everyone is familiar with the Sibelius symphony, although it might be the composer's best known, and its conclusion is one of the grandest in the repertoire.

Sibelius' symphony is the kind of work that often doesn't seem to go anywhere, at least in the traditional sense — one gets the impression of a lot of terrific music in search of a single direction — but the journey is quite satisfying, containing interesting orchestral composition, ensemble combinations and instrumental techniques. Overall, the work is filled with tension and drama, growing out of a pastoral-sounding opening "allegretto" movement, with a lilting little dance built on rich strings, winds and horns. The ECU players gave this opening movement a strong, cohesive sound, especially in the strings. The second "tempo andante, ma rubato" movement opens with timpani and plucked basses (an example of interesting ensemble combination), joined by cellos, and builds in intensity with a fine brass crescendo. Before the movement ends, one feels the same kind of tension that developed in the first section.

The third and fourth movements, "vivacissimo" and "finale-allegro moderato," are played without break, and for those not familiar with the work, the slowly developing climax to the final movement, which is stated once, and then a second time, is an almost jaw-dropping piece of composition that ranks with the most thrilling of symphony finales. What is especially wonderful about this section is the none-

too-subtle shift from a swirling, nervous minor key figure that bursts forth to a major key repeat, which transforms the entire closing from darkness to light. Under director Jorge Richter, the ECU players gave such an impressive reading, capturing all this minor-to-major, darkness-to-light buildup in its full intensity.

In another program devised by another music director, the Sibelius symphony would have been a glorious conclusion, but Richter teamed up with Benjamin Hochman, the highly skilled Israeli-born pianist who has started his second year on the ECU faculty, in presenting one of the most popular pieces in the piano literature as the second part of this concert. The Rachmaninoff concerto is familiar to so many, from concerts and recordings, that soloist and orchestra run the risk of disappointing listeners if mistakes or differences in interpretation occur too frequently.

Such was not the case in this concert, however. Hochman gave an assured reading of this romantic masterpiece, and the ECU players provided splendid accompaniment throughout. Hochman's playing captured the beauty and power of Rachmaninoff's composition, and he provided both intensity and majesty as well as gracefulness and lyricism. At times his playing had a liquid quality; at other times, pure fire.

The opening "moderato" movement, which actually starts with a piano solo of several dark chords, might have been played at a bit more leisurely tempo than one was accustomed to, but that was not an indication that Richter and Hochman were going to slow down just because the accompaniment came from a student orchestra. Indeed, the piece builds to a serious let-out-the-stops conclusion with the famous theme in the final "allegro scherzando" movement, and the ECU players were up to the challenge of keeping pace with the soloist, especially at the grand closing, without sacrificing any of the emotional power of the famous melody line.

A piece of such high romanticism must contain at least some traps for students still learning the subtleties and intricacies of the classical repertoire, and this must be especially true of learning to play with a soloist. Yet under Richter's direction, the ECU orchestra had all the attacks down, excellent timing and precise entrances and releases, and the group provided wonderful backing for Hochman's elegant playing.

The performance was close to flawless — one noticed a few bobbles here and there, but only a few — and section for section, this orchestra showed its expertise, not to mention a gratifying maturity, with both the austere grandeur of Sibelius and the lush romanticism of Rachmaninoff. Richter has programmed some other interesting works for this season (Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 2, Bruch's "Scottish Fantasy," Strauss' Concerto for Oboe, Leonard Bernstein's Suite from *On the Waterfront*), and if future performances match this opening, one can now say that eastern North Carolina has a symphony orchestra to be reckoned with.

Benjamin Hochman

The New York Times

December 27, 2010

MUSIC REVIEW

Proud Parents With Cameras, Clicking Away

By Anthony Tommasini

The violinist Jennifer Koh and the pianist Benjamin Hochman, the soloists for Friday's concert.

You might think that Christmas Eve would not the best night to attract an audience to a classical music concert. Think again.

The New York String Orchestra, conducted by Jaime Laredo, played its annual Christmas Eve concert at Carnegie Hall, and the place was nearly full. Well conceived for a holiday evening, the 60-minute program started at 7 and featured two works by Mozart along with a Mendelssohn novelty: the Concerto for Violin, Piano and Strings in D minor — an exuberant, appealing and precocious work written when the composer was just 14. The outstanding soloists were the violinist Jennifer Koh and the pianist Benjamin Hochman.

The New York String Orchestra is an unusual venture that has attracted a loyal following. The core of the program that resulted in Friday's concert is an intensive 10-day training seminar for young musicians, established in 1969 for the violinist and conductor Alexander Schneider and continued after his death in 1993 by Mr. Laredo. This year 64 students ages 16 to 25 from across the United States and Canada have been brought to New York for chamber music

workshops and coaching sessions with master musicians.

Every year two orchestra programs are prepared during the seminar and performed at Carnegie Hall. The orchestra routinely attracts major soloists for these programs, as it did last year when Peter Serkin played the Brahms D Minor Concerto.

The audience on Friday was fortified by many parents of the players, as was clear from all the flashing cameras in the hall when the students walked onto the stage. Mr. Laredo began with Mozart's Overture to "Così Fan Tutte," a buoyant, lively performance in which the strings were especially good, playing with full-bodied sound and solid execution.

Mendelssohn, like Mozart a prodigy composer, wrote two indisputable masterpieces in his adolescence: the String Octet and Overture to "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Though not on that level, the Concerto for Violin, Piano and Strings is an ambitious and appealing piece.

The young Mendelssohn was a virtuosic performer on piano and violin, and this concerto is an unabashed showpiece for both instruments. The dramatic first movement begins with contrapuntal busyness that evokes Bach's minor-key concertos. The contrasting second theme is wafting music with an airy Italianate melody.

The piano and violin introduce themselves by trading rhapsodic flourishes and soon proceed to a competitive musical conversation. A real contest would not be a fair fight, for a piano could easily bully a violin. But Mendelssohn makes the piano behave here, and there are frequent violin excursions accompanied by filigreed runs and rippling arpeggios on the solicitous piano.

The Adagio movement is Mozartean and elegant. Everything breaks loose in the whirlwind finale, though the virtuosic writing for the soloists calms down during a stately episode. Mendelssohn's inexperience comes through in the run-on structure of the piece, which lasts nearly 40 minutes. Some of the extended solo passages are formulaic and, for all the dazzle, insubstantial.

Ms. Koh played with burnished sound and nimble technique; Mr. Hochman played with transparent passagework and rhythmic brio. These impressive young musicians, who are married, perform together regularly. But they have always had very independent careers, and both are thriving right now.

Mr. Laredo ended the program with a stylish and energetic account of Mozart's "Paris" Symphony, a compact, exuberant piece that Mozart wrote during a trip to Paris in a futile search for a job. At the time he was a veteran composer of 22.

The New York String Orchestra performs another program, with works by Barber, Brahms and Beethoven, on Tuesday at 8 p.m. at Carnegie Hall, (212) 247-7800, carnegiehall.org.

Benjamin Hochman

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

March 13, 2010

Noseda brings out the drama in Tchaikovsky, Rossini

By Andrew Druckenbrod

A little-known fact about the famous Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky is that he worked as a music critic, and an astute one, for a Moscow newspaper for several years. We classical music critics are generally proud of this, although we realize he did move on to, ahem, bigger and better things.

Perhaps the pinnacle of Tchaikovsky's journalistic career came when he attended the Wagner's first "Ring" cycle in Bayreuth. He wasn't thrilled about the music and plot of the four operas, calling "Das Rheingold" "unlikely nonsense," but he liked the theatrics of the production, and it's no surprise that he so often infused his own works with drama (Symphony No. 4 and 5, for instance), dance (ballets "Swan Lake" and "Sleeping Beauty") or both ("The Nutcracker" and Symphony No. 6, "Pathetique").

Friday night at Heinz Hall, the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra led by Gianandrea Noseda presented another little-known bit about Tchaikovsky, his Symphony No. 3, "Polish." It too tried to be dramatic and dance-like, but the reason we don't hear it so often was apparent -- or was it?

Clearly this strange, five-movement symphony written in 1875 is a step below the trinity of Four, Five and Six. It is trying to be too many things: a dance suite (which are in five movements, and referencing dance forms like the Polish polonaise), a melancholy Russian work and a formal, Germanic symphony (complete with a fugue). But experienced live, it has a lot to recommend it. One can both appreciate the music for its own sake and hear Tchaikovsky on the very edge of coming into his own as a symphonic composer.

I would argue that if this symphony were performed by a conductor with the skills and artistic commitment of Mr. Noseda, we would hear it more often. His passion for this obscure work poured into the orchestra, convincing it to treat it with artistry typically reserved for the best of the standard repertoire. Mr. Noseda dispatched the brooding opening with a thunderous crescendo, forcefully announcing it as Tchaikovsky's only symphony in a major key. The second theme seemed to drop from the sky, and then the conductor unleashed a boisterous ending. Mr. Noseda's solution to the stylistic incongruities of the Third was just to let them happen, and the work benefited. A wonderful, off-kilter melody in the second movement led to a moody slow movement, with a wistful solo by bassoonist David Sogg. The fourth stanza found Mr. Noseda almost strumming the orchestra like a single instrument, and the finale was gloriously over the top. Better not return this one to the dust bin.

For all his charisma in breathing such life into a lesser-known work, Mr. Noseda's talent was even more obvious leading Rossini's famous Overture to "La Cenerentola (Cinderella)." This work is a diamond that will make any conductor seem adequate, but Mr. Noseda cut it into brilliant facets and buffed it like I have never heard before (and I have heard it many times.) He crafted every phrase with drama drawn from a preternatural feeling for how Rossini intended his concertos to work as preludes to his madcap operas. The famous

crescendos were tasteful, the orchestra played with vitality and the second theme solos were contoured gorgeously with a hushed sigh midway through when played by clarinetist Michael Rusinek, oboist Cynthia DeAlmeida and piccolo player Rhian Kenny.

Israeli pianist Benjamin Hochman returned to shed light on the drama in Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 19, a work that combines operatic-like melodies and instrumental brilliance. Mr. Hochman seems made for Mozart. He played with poise and patience and a round, deep tone that was still nimble and clear. I could have imagined a performance with more electricity and humor, but his confidence in his reading emphasized the elegance of the work and was certainly convincing.

Benjamin Hochman

METRO PULSE

November 25, 2009

Pianist Benjamin Hochman and KSO Engage With Masterful Performances of Mendelssohn, Wagner, and Strauss

By Alan Sherrod

Although Felix Mendelssohn's reputation has never really been in doubt, the 200th anniversary year of the composer's birth has served—for orchestras all over the world—as an excellent excuse to spotlight one of the abiding geniuses of 19th-century music. In fact, the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra offered several Mendelssohn works last spring and will offer more next spring. But as 2009 wanes, the KSO gave the Mendelssohn bicentennial year one last hurrah with its Masterworks Concert last weekend, albeit with one of his less deep and more presentational works—the Piano Concerto No. 1 in G minor.

If nothing else, the performance of the Mendelssohn served to introduce Knoxville audiences to a talented young pianist, Benjamin Hochman. Hochman brought to the work a performance that sparkled, rippled, and effervesced with life and love. When one learns that the concerto was the work of a 22-year old Mendelssohn—who wrote it in only a few short days while infatuated with a gifted 17-year old pianist, Delphine von Schauroth, to whom he dedicated it—Hochman's romantic, but certainly not frivolous, approach seems absolutely obvious and spot-on. The glittering passages of addictive melodies might lead some pianists to over-romanticize the work for the sake of showmanship, but not Hochman. His was a somewhat light and controlled touch that yielded an almost pearlescent tone. The final spirit-lifting crescendo with the orchestra was exhilarating.

The concert's performance arc began, though, with an early symphony of Joseph Haydn, the Symphony No. 16 in B-flat Major. While I have certainly been a proponent of hearing more Haydn—and, thankfully, we shall next spring—I couldn't help but wonder why this particular symphony (out of 106) was chosen. Having said that, its simple opening theme is very engaging, with just a hint of the subtle twists of later Haydn works; its exciting Presto finale was satisfying and completely enjoyable.

With the intermission to clear our palates, Maestro Lucas Richman served up the second half of the concert with two works of Richard Wagner and Richard Strauss derived from their operas: Wagner's Prelude and Liebestod from *Tristan und Isolde* and Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier Suite*.

Wagner combined the Prelude of *Tristan und Isolde* with its final "Transfiguration" into a concert piece in order to stir up production interest in the years that led up to its eventual

premiere in 1865 at the Munich Opera. While the characteristics of the score do not specifically shock us today, Tristan was undeniably a signpost of change in moving beyond the classical tonal system. The chromaticism and lack of a recognizable tonal center is not jarring or unpleasant, but rather seems totally natural—almost predictable—as it approaches a tonal resolution that never comes. This was not a merely arbitrary device, but Wagner's symbolic description of the two lovers' unresolved desires.

Admittedly, Richman has not in the past come readily to mind when considering Wagnerian conductors, but therein lies the evening's surprise. On this occasion he drew a radiant and glowing performance from the orchestra that was both generous in the Wagner characteristic of expanding and contracting dynamics, as well as in the details and precision of individual performances, particularly the woodwinds.

Richman concluded the evening by moving into the 20th century with the Suite from *Der Rosenkavalier* by Richard Strauss. Although the opera premiered in Dresden in 1911, Strauss did not assemble the parts into a concert suite until 1944. The danger inherent in the piece lies in the fact that Strauss' use of waltzes, taken out of context, can give one the impression of just a medley of tunes from the opera. In Richman's beautiful interpretation, though, it unfolded through the vivid orchestral textures more like one of Strauss' tone poems, although a more relaxed one—which is high praise indeed.

Strauss used the horns extensively in his orchestrations and this piece is no exception. The KSO horns, under principal Calvin Smith, were solid throughout the work, but particularly in the infamous "whooping horns" passage, that well-known and signature passage at the beginning of the work. Taken overall, the KSO's balance was as good as I've ever heard it.

Benjamin Hochman

THE VANCOUVER SUN

May 31, 2009

by David Gordon Duke

REVIEW: Shining debut and epic Prokofiev at VSO

As the VSO's current season winds down, one of the year's most intriguing programs sees Conductor Laureate Kazuyoshi Akiyama lead his old band at the Orpheum in works by Mozart and Prokofiev.

The program gets off to a cheeky, incisive start with Kabalevsky's Colas Breugnon Overture, both a curtain raiser and a sample of the high Soviet idiom more extensively explored later in the evening.

Young pianist Benjamin Hochman makes his VSO debut in Mozart's "Jeunehomme" Concerto, K. 271, an early work but one of very considerable interest.

Any Mozart provides an infallible test of an emerging pianist's real musical prowess.

Hochman's interpretation is stylish and lucid, with patrician authority and touches of elegant wit where context allows.

This is brainy music-making as well: Hochman's pacing in the troubled central Andantino has depth and a measure of darkness that complements the surrounding light — but definitely not lightweight — outer movements.

Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony completes the agenda, a product of that composers' final period as a self-declared Soviet composer, when he was charged with toeing the Party line about sturdy tunes and uplifting sentiments.

The symphony is rich in the sort of soaring themes that have made the ballet music from Romeo and Juliet almost overfamiliar, but it ratchets up the stakes several notches by using symphonic structure to create a musical epic for the time — that time being the last years of the Second World War.

It's perfect material for Akiyama.

Holding to a firm idea of the work's overall thrust, despite the occasionally discursive nature of the music, Akiyama conducts with all the sang froid needed to cope with Prokofiev's sometimes unruly detailing and frankly freakish orchestral effects. He displays an emphatic understanding of the great, glorious ideas that struggle to be brought forth, with no shirking of their occasional ambiguities.

If the extraordinary coda that ends the first movement can be read as celebrating "the glory of the human spirit," the manic conclusion reminds us of Prokofiev's irrepressible, anarchic individualism.

VSO fans who remember the Akiyama years fondly will find much to enjoy in this program: his energy and enthusiasm, not to mention his inimitable way with the orchestra's winds and brass, make this a concert to savour.

Benjamin Hochman

The New York Times

February 12, 2007

Scratch a Conductor, Find a Composer

Hiroyuki Ito for The New York Times

The soloist Benjamin Hochman and members of the American Symphony Orchestra at Avery Fisher.

MUSIC REVIEW

VIVIEN SCHWEITZER

The composer-conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen once said that he is a musician above all, and that "musicians do all kinds of things."

That was certainly the case before the emergence of star conductors in the late 19th century, although many podium giants of the 20th century also composed, to varying degrees.

The works of George Szell, who was music director of the Cleveland Orchestra from 1946 until his death in 1970, are barely known. But Szell's music was among the works by conductors that were highlighted on Friday in an American Symphony Orchestra concert at Avery Fisher Hall led by Leon Botstein, a tireless champion of musical rarities.

Mahler and Richard Strauss both struggled with the composer-conductor balancing act. Szell, who made his debut at 11 as a pianist playing his own compositions and was awarded a major publishing contract at 14, apparently stopped composing shortly after he was chosen by Strauss to join the staff of the Berlin State Opera at 18.

The program opened with Szell's deftly orchestrated, cheery and melodic Variations on an Original Theme, (Op. 4, 1913), which show the harmonic influence of Strauss. It's not a particularly memorable work but certainly impressive for a teenager.

The American Symphony Orchestra also performed the New York premiere of the percussionist and conductor Harold Farberman's lively Double Concerto for Violin and Percussion (2006), dedicated to Guillermo Figueroa, a violinist and conductor. Its three movements represent Mr. Figueroa as a young man, his children, and Mr. Figueroa and his wife.

A musical marriage of percussion and violin is potentially rocky. But it's all about communication, and there was a witty dialogue between the vibraphone and violin. During the work, at times dissonant, contemplative and stirringly tonal, the energetic percussionist Simon Boyar leapt about the stage from wind chimes to drums, playing with panache. Mr. Figueroa performed the violin part with the sensitivity of a man exploring his own psyche.

The cynical, evocative and theatrical Symphony No. 2, "The Age of Anxiety" (1949/'65), by Leonard Bernstein concluded the program. It too is a deeply personal work, inspired by W. H. Auden's poem of the same name about four lonely people bonding in a New York bar.

Bernstein, who was the pianist at the premiere in 1949, called it a "symphony with piano solo." Its episodic structure follows the narrative of Auden's poem, with fragments of Bernstein's published and unpublished works, including a jazzy piano riff originally written for but dropped from "On the Town." The sensitive soloist was Benjamin Hochman, a fine young Israeli pianist.

Bernstein also classified himself as a musician above all. In a 1980 speech to the American Symphony Orchestra League, he spoke of the "drastic change of persona" that occurs when a public figure like a conductor becomes a private one like a composer.

Paul Kletzki (1900-1973), a Polish Jew chosen by Furtwängler to become a principal conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic in 1932, was robbed of the chance to compose or conduct by the Nazis, who came to power the following year. According to the program notes, he ceased composing after the war.

But his Violin Concerto (Op. 19, 1928) received its United States premiere on Friday with Robert Davidovici as the excellent soloist. The American Symphony Orchestra, which played well throughout the evening, gave a convincing performance of the three-movement piece, which wavers between tonality and dissonance, with lyrical violin lines, spiky harmonies and lighthearted allusions to cabaret music.

American Symphony Orchestra

Avery Fisher Hall

Benjamin Hochman

The New York Times

October 31, 2006

A Young Man's Berg and a Bach for All Seasons

by Anne Midgette

MUSIC REVIEW

ANNE MIDGETTE

What links the pieces of a concert together? At the Metropolitan Museum on Sunday afternoon, Benjamin Hochman, a young Israeli pianist making his New York recital debut, offered a taut emotional arc, each piece leading to the next in a way that made sense. In a few places the arc was sketched in rather than filled out, but the general picture was of a talented young artist working out the frame within which he will add details as he gains experience and maturity.

Fluidity and resiliency were two hallmarks of Mr. Hochman's playing, and they came to the fore immediately in the Praeambulum to Bach's Partita No. 5, executed with the smoothness of cream but the transparency of water.

The Allemande introduced flecks of rubato, hints of hesitation like the uncertainty of human breath, but Mr. Hochman soon returned to what sounded like firmer footing.

Hiroyuki Ito for The New York Times

Benjamin Hochman played a piece by Menachem Wiesenberg, as well as music by Bach, Berg and Schubert.

Benjamin Hochman
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Berg's Opus 1 sonata made a strong contrast, warmly anchored in a past century and speaking with what now sounds like a kind of innocence, from its expressive earnestness to the ethereal notes of the close. It is strong, young music, and fits this pianist like a glove.

Third was the first performance of a work commissioned by Mr. Hochman from his compatriot Menachem Wiesenberg, a nice, tightly wound piece called "Metamorphosis I."

It combined the agility of the Bach with the expressivity of the Berg, shifting from nervous energy to more lyrical expansiveness and back to a kind of jazzy syncopation without ever lingering too long over any one part.

Constructing an emotional arc, with room to sketch in details.

Schubert was the capstone: a slightly heavy one for this able young artist, who attacked the C minor sonata with self-conscious force, then became entangled in its subtleties so that the second movement slowed to near stasis. He hit his stride in the fourth movement, finding the resiliency to make the details crisp and bring a nice close to a pleasant concert.

Benjamin Hochman

The New York Times

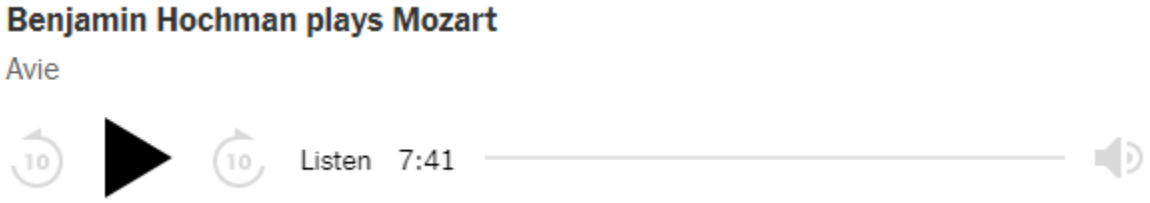
January 4, 2020

Yes, We Need (Yet) Another Rachmaninoff Recording

New accounts of standard works, even those covered by dozens of classic recordings, can still enliven classical music.

By Anthony Tommasini

Mozart
Piano Concertos No. 17 in G and No. 24 in C Minor; Benjamin Hochman, pianist and conductor; English Chamber Orchestra (Avie)



Click to listen or visit https://nyti.ms/36lBQqR

Mr. Hochman, whose career as a pianist has been thriving, took time off recently to study conducting. It was time well spent. The stylistic insight, elegance and sparkle of Mr. Hochman's pianism are beautifully matched by the playing of the orchestra. The finale of the Concerto in G, structured in theme and variations form, is exceptionally inventive: Each variation comes as a bit of a surprise.

Benjamin Hochman

December 1, 2019

Benjamin Hochman: Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756-1791)

By David R. Dunsmore

Benjamin Hochman is a new name to me and I would direct you to his website which has a biography, details of recordings and assures us that he studied with the Claude Franck and Richard Goode. Here he is playing two Mozart piano concertos, one fairly well known and the other the famous and disturbing K491, one of my favourites. Following the footsteps of Daniel Barenboim (Warner), and Murray Perahia (Sony), he both plays and directs the English Chamber Orchestra. Briefly, he achieves great success with both pieces, well up to the standards of the two performers who preceded him. This is a very stimulating and life-affirming record.

Piano Concerto No.17 in G major is one of six piano concertos he wrote in 1784 and his sense of joy seems to spill over in this concerto. The Allegro has real vigour but none of the angst that seems to occur in Nos 20 and 24, for example. Hochman plays with real joie de vivre and the ECO are all at one with him. The Andante has a slight wistful air. I see that the fine notes by Hochman mention this aspect too, and is beautifully captured by the wind in particular. I find the development of the theme sublime. A variation is used as Mozart did so often in these works. Hochman has deep empathy here and demands a listener's full attention. It may be beautiful music but it's not pretty and as I've mentioned elsewhere, there's no hint of the "Dresden China" approach. The depth of the piano is very well captured by the engineers. The Allegretto-Presto is a set of five variations. Apparently Mozart acquired a starling who could whistle the first variation. I'm indebted to the performer's notes for this fascinating piece of information. The movement has an effervescence which is certainly not present in the more world-weary Piano Concerto No.24. The soloist and orchestra convey this triumphantly.

Piano Concerto No.24 is a much more serious piece. The minor key indicates a sense of foreboding which arches over the tumultuous opening. This is most impressive and the somewhat hesitant piano entry shows the listener that the sense of well-being of the earlier work has evaporated. It certainly has elements of "Sturm und Drang" (storm and stress) deployed by Haydn during his middle symphonies. The two composers influenced each other.

Hochman is excellent in No. 24 but I'm sure lovers of this piece will also want to return to such as Barenboim, Curzon (Decca) and Uchida (Philips). I should also add that Brendel is much admired in this work. The wit of Mozart's writing here, even if it is devoid of humour, is brought out magnificently. The Larghetto is simultaneously both marvellous and heart-breaking. The slow movement, along with that of Piano Concerto No.21, happens to be my favourite slow movement among

Mozart's piano concertos; not an easy choice. The playing here is near perfect and I hope no one will ask me to make comparisons. The Allegretto is also a set of variations and is droll, whilst never escaping that feeling of pervasive dread. The wind ensemble is excellent throughout and is reminiscent of works such as the Gran Partita for thirteen wind instruments. The concerto ends, if not in triumph, with a sense of accomplishment.

It seems to me quite remarkable to play this music but also successfully to conduct an orchestra is quite extraordinary; great artists can achieve this. Hochman seems to be in tune with Mozart's spirit here, the composer also played and directed.

This is a very enjoyable and accomplished recording of two wonderful pieces and I look forward to much more from this source.

Benjamin Hochman

November 18, 2019

Mozart: Piano Concertos 17 & 24 (CD review)

If you are as unfamiliar with pianist Benjamin Hochman as I was, here is a passage from his Web site to help you get acquainted: "Winner of the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant in 2011, Benjamin Hochman's eloquent and virtuosic performances blend colorful artistry with poetic interpretation to the delight of audiences and critics alike. He performs in major cities around the world as an orchestral soloist, recitalist and chamber musician, working with an array of renowned musicians. Possessed of an intellectual and heartfelt musical inquisitiveness, his playing was described by the *Vancouver Sun* as "stylish and lucid, with patrician authority and touches of elegant wit." Hochman frequently juxtaposes familiar and unfamiliar works in his concert programs, a talent that also extends to his thoughtful recorded repertoire, from Bach and Mozart to Kurtág and Peter Lieberson. *The New York Times* wrote of pianist Benjamin Hochman "classical music doesn't get better than this."

After that, it's a lot to live up to. Fortunately, he does. He's obviously a fine young pianist and deserves attention. The thing I liked most about this playing on this Mozart album is that he never seems to show off his virtuosity as a few more celebrated pianists of his generation do. He appears to be content to play the music without embellishment and to play it rather traditionally as opposed to what we hear from today's popular "historically informed performances" do. To some ears, that may mean he's a bit old-fashioned. So be it; he's also comfortably entertaining.

Explaining why he chose this particular pairing of Mozart concertos, Mr. Hochman explains, "I chose to record these two concertos because to me they are mirror images of each other. The *G major* is full of sunshine and joy, but it also has these moments of darkness that show complexity, whereas the *C minor* is essentially tragic, full of fury and storm, yet it also has moments of calm and resignation, including much of the slow movement. Also, the last movements of the two concertos are both in variation form--the only two final movements of Mozart piano concertos that are variations. For these reasons, the two concertos really complement each other very well."

The set begins with the *Piano Concerto No. 17 in G major*, K.453, which Mozart wrote in 1781 along with five others. The concerto is lyrical and playful, and Hochman's performance is as frolicsome as the piece demands while remaining polished and civilized. Mozart intended a degree of melancholy to pervade the second-movement *Andante*, which Hochman handles with delicacy. Then, there's that memorable finale; Mozart himself was so fond of it that he taught his pet starling to sing it. Hochman seems to be enjoying himself here, too, yet he never goes overboard in forcing the merriment of the variations.

The *Piano Concerto No. 24 in c minor*, K491 is a contrast to *No. 17*, more mature, darker and more dramatic. Mozart finished it in

1786, writing it for a larger array of instruments than for *No. 17*, more so than for any of his other concertos, in fact, and its opening movement is the longest he had written to that point. Some music critics admire it so much, they consider it the best piano concerto Mozart ever wrote. I wouldn't go that far, but, then, music is so much a matter of taste and opinion, who can say?

You can tell from its long introduction that *No. 24* has a bigger feel than his previous concertos and a more somber tone. When the piano finally enters, it's quietly subdued, Hochman gradually increasing its emotional scope and building its dramatic intensity. Still, Hochman always maintains an admirable poise, one clearly appropriate to the classical style. The slow, middle movement is sweet and simple, Hochman keeping it that way with playing both light and transparent. Hochman concludes by playing the finale with the grace and dignity it deserves as the culmination of an essentially tragic concerto, yet he never lets it sag and lag.

Hochman's interpretations of both concertos on the album are sensible, often reflective, and somewhat sedate. Whether that is what the listener is looking for is, of course, again a matter of personal taste. While there is certainly nothing earthshaking or revelatory about Hochman's readings, they are comfortably well performed, with thought and care. For most listeners that should be more than enough.

Producers Eric Wen and Melanne Mueller and engineer Dennis Patterson recorded the music at St. John's Smith Square, London in April 2019. As we have come to expect from Avie recordings, the sound on this one is as natural as one could want. It's not overly precise or clinically transparent; it's just clear, clean, and realistic, with as much detail as one would hear in a concert hall. There's a pleasant ambience communicated from the venue that adds to one's enjoyment, too, as well as a perceptible and lifelike depth to the orchestra. Moreover, the sound is smooth enough to enhance and enrich Hochman's fluent delivery. It all works quite well together. Although the piano stretches a bit far across the sound stage for my taste, it's not a serious concern when everything else lines up so well.

Benjamin Hochman

The New York Times

April 15, 2015

Classical Playlist

By Anthony Tommasini

Variations by Berio, Benjamin, Knussen, Lieberson and Brahms

Benjamin Hochman, piano
Avie AV2327 (one CD)

The thoughtful, accomplished Israeli-born pianist Benjamin Hochman devised a fascinating program of works in variation form for this splendid new recording. If you think yourself resistant to atonal, modernist styles of music, listen to the inventive, fantastical and sensitive accounts that Mr. Hochman gives of Oliver Knussen's Variations, Op. 24 and Berio's "Cinque Variazioni" and you may have an epiphany. There are extraordinary performances of a meditative George Benjamin piece and Peter Lieberson's elaborate 1996 Piano Variations, all building to the final offering: a commanding, exuberant account of Brahms's great, and daunting, Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel.

Benjamin Hochman

THE NEW YORKER

June 26, 2015

Two Young Pianists Take Manhattan

By Russell Platt

Benjamin Hochman gives an unabashed emphasis to modern repertory.

...If Huebner has found his ideal niche at the Philharmonic, then Benjamin Hochman is a prime example of another New York type, the up-and-coming soloist. What makes him unusual, however, is the unabashed emphasis he has given to modern repertory, which he balances effortlessly with the classics in his recitals and recordings. His new album, "Variations" (Avie), is another testament to his talent. Works by Knussen, Berio, George Benjamin (the lovingly gentle "Meditation on Haydn's Name"), Peter Lieberson (surprisingly, the world-première recording of the richly entertaining Piano Variations, from 1996), and Brahms (the monumental Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel) are linked not only by a common aspect of compositional technique but by the air of quiet mystery—backed by rock-solid musicianship—that Hochman brings to all of them. Among his attributes are an extraordinary sensitivity to harmonic pacing and a sly mastery of the pedals, which allows him to open up volumes of space within the general sound—the low, middle, and high registers held in exquisite equilibrium. (The album should properly be listened to at home, through good speakers.) There is something feline and elusive about this artist, as if he were providing us with but a portion of his capacious musical imagination. I look forward to sampling more of it.

Benjamin Hochman

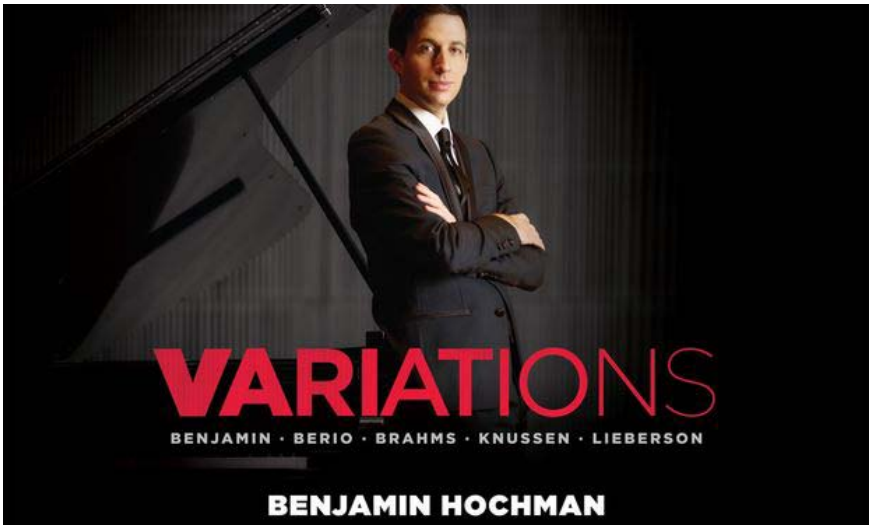
WQXR 105.9 fm wqxr.org

March 9, 2015

Q2 Music Album of the Week

Benjamin Hochman Reinvigorates a Familiar Theme in 'Variations'

By Daniel Stephen Johnson



Among all of classical music's received forms, the theme and variations has easily the most immediate appeal to the novice listener: a musical idea is stated, and then passes through a series of transformations. The surface of the music offers constant—for lack of a better word—variety, while the underlying theme provides a familiar element, a fixed point at which to grasp the piece.

The composers on "Variations" pianist Benjamin Hochman's new disc on the Avie label, are ideally suited to this form. While they might seem to have nothing in common, Oliver Knussen, Luciano Berio, George Benjamin and Peter Lieberson—represented by works from the mid to late 20th century—and from a hundred years earlier, Johannes Brahms, have all created music in a dense, deeply involved style, but are drawn by the lucidity of the form to create clear, easily engaging works.

Brahms' massive *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel* makes up the bulk of the program, and Hochman realizes this familiar set of variations in a clear and unsentimental performance, letting the piece's own excesses speak for themselves, rather than exaggerating for effect. His cerebral approach is more obviously required in the more contemporary works, which bring out another aspect of variation form that has made it attractive to

composers who draw on the Modernist tradition: the generation of whole works from tiny amounts of material.

And all of the contemporary composers on the program are masters of musical color, presenting in these pieces an alluring array of sonic effects. In Berio's early *Cinque Variazioni*, a set of variations presented without their theme, the wild experimentation of his mature works may not yet have arrived, but their sensual appeal is already in place.

Peter Lieberson, who would later cross over to mainstream classical success with his *Neruda Songs* in the 21st century, took the opposite career path towards a deeply affecting, almost Romantic language, but the charms of his *Piano Variations* from 1989 are hardly remote. Traces of their late masterpieces are already hidden in these works, like the variations waiting to be discovered in a theme.

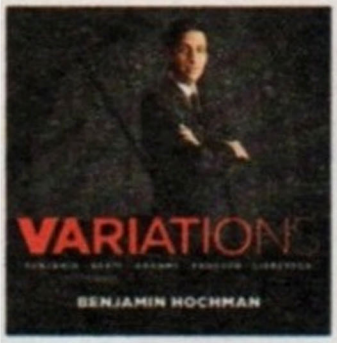
Benjamin Hochman

THE TIMES

February 26, 2015

OLIVER KNUSSEN ET AL
VARIATIONS

Benjamin Hochman (piano)
Avie AV2327



Celebrating the enduring power of the variations form, this recital moves from distinguished recent examples to Brahms's resplendent Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, Op 24. Knussen's Variations, Op 24, are only seven minutes, but a beautiful example of foreshortening. Berio's Cinque Variazioni work an often explosive atonal magic on a three-note cell from Dallapiccola's opera Il Prigioniero; Peter Lieberson's Piano Variations (1996), in its first recording, and structurally inspired by the four elements, is as friendly to the ear as it is fiercely virtuosic. ***PD***

KIRSHBAUM ASSOCIATES INC.
711 WEST END AVENUE SUITE 5KN NEW YORK NY 10025 (212) 222-4843 TEL (212) 222-7321 FAX WWW.KIRSHBAUMASSOCIATES.COM

Benjamin Hochman

The New York Times

December 25, 2013

Classical Playlist: Thomas Adès, Benjamin Hochman, Angela Hewitt and More

'HOMAGE TO SCHUBERT'
Benjamin Hochman, pianist
(Avie)

The excellent and inquisitive Israeli-born pianist Benjamin Hochman pays homage to Schubert with vibrant and stylish accounts of the gentle Sonata in A (D. 664) and the ebullient Sonata in D (D. 850). He includes daring works by two major living composers written in tribute to Schubert: Gyorgy Kurtag's short, mercurial piece "Hommage à Schubert" and Jörg Widmann's inventive, 12-minute "Idyll und Abgrund," which takes bits of Schubert and filters them through a strange, sometimes audacious contemporary prism.(Tommasini)

Benjamin Hochman

The Arts Fuse
Est. 2007
Boston's online arts magazine
Powered by 60 expert writers + critics

February 9, 2014

Fuse CD Reviews: Benjamin Hochman's "Hommage à Schubert"

Pianist Benjamin Hochman is a musician who's interested in insightful programs that can be provocative, speak across centuries, and engage the mind as much as they delight it.

By Jonathan Blumhofer

Winner of the prestigious 2011 Avery Fischer Career Grant, pianist Benjamin Hochman is easily one of the most thoughtful and compelling young pianists on the scene today. And his new album from Avie Records demonstrates just why: he's a musician who's interested in insightful programs that can be provocative, speak across centuries, and engage the mind as much as they delight it.

Such is the case with this substantial disc that includes two Schubert piano sonatas (no. 13, in A major, and no. 17, in D minor) paired with works by György Kurtág and Jörg Widman.

In both sonatas, Hochman's playing is fresh, incisive, and exciting. He has a firm grasp on the big, expressive arcs that make up both pieces (especially the D major), but his attention to detail in the little things is what leaves the biggest impression: his precise articulation of the tied, dotted figures in the D major Sonata's scherzo, for instance, and his haunting realization of the refrain of the A major Sonata's enigmatic middle movement help bring this music viscerally to life.

What really makes this disc most notable, though, are the two pieces Hochman pairs with the sonatas. Hommage à Schubert, Kurtág's questing miniature, unfolds in just over a minute, it's pungent chords and enigmatic phrasings at once familiar and unsettling.

Widman's *Idyll und Abgrund* is subtitled "Schubert-Reminiszenzen" and features plenty of recognizable allusions to Schubert melodies. But they're all viewed through a kind of refracted 21st-century lens that incorporates all kinds of contemporary features – odd phrasings, chromatic harmonies, even some extended techniques (check out Hochman's whistling in the fourth movement) – intruding on these charming tunes. The result is impressively touching, filled with humor, charm, and pathos; not unlike, in fact, a lot of Schubert's best music. Hochman plays it all fearlessly.

Benjamin Hochman

Fanfare
The Magazine for Serious Record Collectors

January/February 2014

SCHUBERT Piano Sonata in A, D664. Piano Sonata in D, D850 KURTÁG Hommage à Schubert WIDMANN Idyll und Abgrund • Benjamin Hochman (pn) • AVIE AV2281 (71:57)

There was a convention among music critics, not used much these days, to refer to pianists as "naturals" for a given composer. Schnabel/Beethoven, Rubinstein/Chopin, Geiseking/Debussy, and so on. I think the term applies to Benjamin Hochman's Schubert playing. He is aware, though not precious, about his particular bond to this music, as he refers, in his eloquent program notes, to the "striking dichotomy between lyricism and drama" in the two sonatas he presents here. The young Israeli born artist, a recently graduated student of Claude Frank and Richard Goode at Curtis, has an especially fine way with the gentle side of Schubert, with a carefully wrought tonality and vocal rhythmic pacing that recalls Kempff. His tempos are relaxed, and his phrasing has a flexibility that points the music forward, rather than backward, in a musical historical sense.

Hochman compliments the two Schubert sonatas with new music that is inspired by the Viennese master. György Kurtág, who has also written haunting music based on Bach, here presents a whisper of piece, about a minute long, that sounds like a dreamy vision of a Schubert slow movement, perhaps even that of the Sonata in A that Hochman plays, which it mimics both rhythmically and melodically. Jorg Widmann is scarcely less concise in his six pieces comprising *Idyll and Abyss*, which, with its alternating ebullience and inwardness seems to tie Schubert to Schumann. I prefer the Webern like precision of the Kurtág piece, but Widmann certainly conveys a deep and sincere love of Schubert.

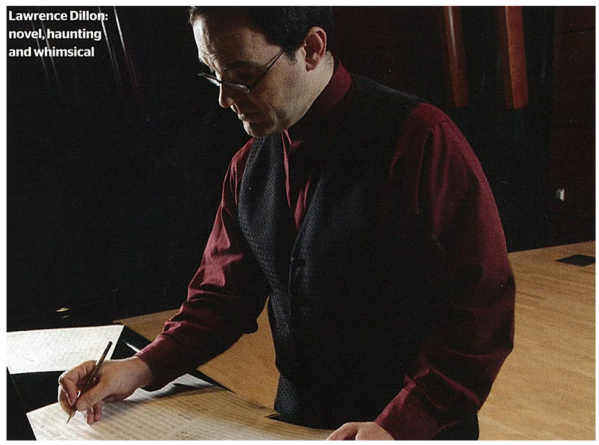
I am sure that certain music lovers will object to the inclusion of contemporary music on this program, but Hochman is making a point, namely, that Schubert is as contemporary, timeless, really, in his ability to touch us to the depths. Those so inclined will miss the opportunity to hear a very promising new artist, but I am quite sure there will be many other chances.

-Peter Burwasser

Benjamin Hochman

GRAMOPHONE

March 2011



Lawrence Dillon: novel, haunting and whimsical

Sly and MYSTERIOUS

Daedalus Quartet relish Dillon's novel use of the genre

L Dillon

'Insects and Paper Airplanes'
String Quartets Nos 2-4. What Happened[a]
Daedalus Quartet (Kyu-Young Kim, Ara Gregorian *vns* Jessica Thompson *va* Raman Ramakrishnan *vc*) [a]**Benjamin Hochman** *pf*
Bridge Ⓔ BRIDGE9332 (73' • DDD)

Just when you thought the string quartet may have reached the edge of sonic possibilities, along comes a composer who makes something novel, haunting and whimsical of the genre. Lawrence Dillon has been helping to flex the ensemble's muscles since the late 20th century, when he began his "Invisible Cities String Quartet Cycle", which will comprise six works upon completion.

Dillon's Second, Third and Fourth Quartets share this new disc with *What Happened*, for violin, viola, cello and piano. Each score is an arresting and appealing creation, full of fanciful and lyrical flourishes within traditional forms that are brightly tweaked. The forms are rondo, aria and fugue, which Dillon explores to inventive effect, without a whiff of academic reverence.

The disc's title, "Insects and Paper Airplanes", comes from the second movement of String Quartet No 2 ("Flight"), six colourful and vibrantly crafted fugues evoking myriad images, from such soaring entities as birds and those onerous insects (which the cellist slaps to oblivion) to stars and the mythological figures Daedalus and Icarus.

String Quartet No 4 ("The Infinite Sphere") comprises two movements built of rondos of many stripes, with rock rhythms occasionally propelling the narratives. In String Quartet No 3 ("Air"), Dillon is at his most poetic in aria-like phrases and contrasting moods, while the three movements of *What Happened* abound in simple, song-like gestures and nimble spurts.

The Daedalus Quartet inhabit every mysterious, tuneful and sly corner of Dillon's music, and pianist Benjamin Hochman joins members of the ensemble in an eventful and detailed account of *What Happened*. Highly recommended.

Donald Rosenberg

Benjamin Hochman

American Record Guide
INDEPENDENT CRITICS REVIEWING CLASSICAL RECORDINGS AND MUSIC IN CONCERT

March/April 2011

DILLON: *Quartets 2-4; What Happened*
Benjamin Hochman, p; Daedalus Quartet
Bridge 9332—73 minutes

I have listened to this recording more often than any other this month, and I am not yet full. The three quartets by Lawrence Dillon are part of a series of six, called the *Invisible Cities String Quartet Cycle*, which he's been working on since 1998. Containing a piano quartet titled *What Happened*, as well, this program nearly bursts with freshness and invention, all the more exciting for the exemplary performances by the Daedalus Quartet and Benjamin Hochman, who obviously love these works. The engineering is also exemplary and brings out all the character of the strings, from the glacial and smooth to the gritty and raw.

Quartet No. 4, *The Infinite Sphere*, from 2009, is a two-movement work inspired, both in title and in content, by a reference by Blaise Pascal to an "infinite sphere, whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere". Each movement has many sections of contrasting character; and it uses a number of circular forms and techniques, including imitative counterpoint and rondo form. It grabs one's attention from the very beginning with an infectiously rhythmic canon, and it changes character often before it closes with wit after 22 minutes. One high point that deserves mention is a slow section in I for string harmonics—a breathtaking, perhaps mournful passage whose beauty will turn heads.

The Quartet No. 3, from 2006, is in one movement, 11 minutes long, and is titled *Air*. It is a nod to the Italian *da capo aria* and is appropriately songful and breathy. The Second Quartet, from 2002, is titled *Flight*, and has six movements Dillon calls fugues, each a miniature character piece connected in some way with the idea of flight. In this quartet the composer shows uncanny creativity in the use of fugal structures, both traditional and more broadly conceived, and he doesn't shy away from the humorous, as in the fourth fugue, 'Langley', which describes the launch and immediate plummet of an early airplane built by Samuel Pierpont Langley in 1903.

What Happened for piano quartet is a three-movement work from 2005 with moments that bring to mind post-romanticism and moments that dispel that thought entirely. Thoroughly engaging.

This is richly rewarding and a reminder that "accessible" needn't be simple—or even overtly tonal.

BYELICK

KIRSHBAUM ASSOCIATES INC.
307 SEVENTH AVENUE SUITE 506 NEW YORK NY 10001 (212) 222-4843 TEL (212) 222-7321 FAX WWW.KIRSHBAUMASSOCIATES.COM

Benjamin Hochman
Discography

AVIE

AV2681 — ***Resonance***: Beethoven, Benjamin, Dowland, Josquin (November 2024).

AV2404 — ***Mozart***: ***Piano Concertos Nos. 17 & 24*** (October 2019).

AV2327 — ***Variations***: Knussen, Berio, Benjamin, Lieberson, Brahms (February 2015).

AV 2281 — ***Homage to Schubert***: Schubert, Kurtág, Widmann, (November 2013).

Artek

AR-0050-2 — ***Introducing Benjamin Hochman***: Bach, Berg, Webern (November 2009).

Bridge

9332 — ***Insects and Paper Airplanes***: Chamber Music by Lawrence Dillon (October 2010).

Avi

8553023 — ***Klavier-festival Ruhr- Portraits***: Debussy, Schubert (September 2008).