

RISING STAR BARNATAN PLAYS WITH PASSION

One of the most rewarding innovations of the Irving S. Gilmore International Keyboard organization has been its Rising Stars Recital Series which brings in, from anywhere on the planet, four or five outstanding young pianists each season. Sunday night's artist at the Wellspring Theatre was 25-year-old Israeli pianist Inon Barnatan, who performed a dazzling program that had me stretching for the highest tier of accolades.



What made Barnatan so noteworthy? First, he exhibited blazing technique throughout the program, an ability he shared with many previous rising stars. But additionally, his musical intelligence led to wholly individual musical identities for the five composers whose works he played.

Beethoven's Sonata No. 6 in F, Op. 10, No. 2 (c. 1796) was Barnatan's opening selection. Beyond secure technique and near-perfect note playing, he expressed the particular sound of this transitional work which preceded Beethoven's compositional period dominated by darker moods and thicker textures. Barnatan played the piece with notable transparency, reflecting its connection to the earlier crystalline classical idiom.

One significant quality thereby emphasized was the inherent playfulness in the music. Staccato passages flowed smoothly into legato sections, and then back again. Barnatan proved masterful as well, with effectively modulated dynamic contrasts.

Schubert's Four Impromptus, D. 935 (1827) completed the recitals first half. Trills were crystalline and sparkling, while numerous hand crossovers in the first impromptu were invariably smooth and perfectly modulated. The final impromptu put on display Barnatan's impressive chromatics and two hands octave runs, bringing to life Schubert's unique Romantic spirit.

Modern composers dominated the second portion of the program. Following an energetic rendering of Fantasy on Themes from Peter Grimes, by pianist-composer Ronald Stevenson, Barnatan performed two works by Ravel, including Alborada del Gracioso, an explosive piece from Mirroirs (1904-5). Barnatan proved himself a wizard when called on to repeat in marcato (pronounced) staccato the same note dozens of times consecutively at presto tempo. Nor did he miss a beat.

Barnatan's brilliant performance of Samuel Barbers mercilessly difficult Sonata in E-flat Minor, Op. 26 (1950) closed the program. With the opening

explosive notes, the pianist is sent on a mission, scurrying up and down the keyboard, fortissimo and presto. The second movement calls for lightly scampering notes, flitting about. Barnatan played unfailingly crystal-clean notes with nary a blurred sound.

After a deliberate adagio third section, Barbers work concluded on a percussive tear, all performed note perfect by Barnatan. As the momentum gained speed, the pianist's hands became blurred images and the mostly atonal sound fragmented and exploding outward until all collapses at the conclusion.

Thanks to such terrific playing, Barnatan helped the audience reach the composers true spirits.

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