

A Step Into This Century With Works Written for the Performer

MUSIC REVIEW

A Step Into This Century With Works Written for the Performer



Hiroyuki Ito

Jay Gottlieb at Mannes College of Music in the International Keyboard Institute and Festival.

By ANTHONY TOMMASINI

A glaring flaw in the otherwise interesting International Keyboard Institute and Festival, currently at the Mannes College of Music, is its conservative programming, which hardly looks beyond Rachmaninoff. Still, the festival made up for its timidity on Saturday afternoon when the pianist Jay Gottlieb showed us the newest of the new in a riveting program called "Piano Music of the 21st Century." The large audience could not have had a better guide. Mr. Gottlieb has devoted a major segment of his career to performing works written for him by composer colleagues.

Though born in New York he has long lived in Paris and is probably not as well known in town as his twin

brother, Gordon Gottlieb, a New York percussionist. Yet Jay Gottlieb's adventurous brilliance has been well documented on a series of valuable recordings, including a recent CD of contemporary works on the Radio France label.

Trained at Juilliard and Harvard, Mr. Gottlieb considered becoming a composer. But performing won out. After working with Nadia Boulanger in Paris, he was drawn into the circle of Messiaen and studied intensively with Messiaen's wife, the pianist Yvonne Loriod.

On Saturday Mr. Gottlieb presented music by a veritable United Nations of composers (from Denmark, Finland, Japan, Morocco, Argentina and France, among others). Most of these works were written for him while the composers were living in Paris.

He cheated just a bit on the "21st century" focus of the program by opening with four études by Maurice Ohana composed in the early 1980's. These astoundingly difficult works evolve in swirling, restless outbursts of tonally unhinged harmonies, though occasionally there is a fleeting riff or lyrical gesture that recalls Debussy, Albeniz or Chopin; you're not really sure, though it seems so familiar. For all their buzzing energy though, the études run on too long, which made the concision of Magnus Lindberg's volatile, pungent three-minute Étude (2001) all the more striking.

"Étude-Variation" by Gilbert Amy, the senior French composer and Pierre Boulez associate, was like some teeming 21st-century version of a Liszt Transcendental Étude, as Mr. Gottlieb put it. The Danish com-

poser Poul Ruders's hyper-fast, incandescent and seemingly impossible "Event Horizon" gave a sense of organic shape to the whirling, essentially atonal coloristic style that Mr. Gottlieb seems to inspire from composers who write for him.

There were also fascinating works by Karen Tanaka, Betsy Jolas, Luis de Pablo, Bruno Mantovani and Oscar Strasnoy ("Exercices de Latinité," composed in 2002, a wildly modernistic apotheosis of, by turns, cha-cha, tango and tarantella).

The lanky Mr. Gottlieb proved an affable proselytizer for these works in his insightful and witty spoken introductions. But it was beautifully colored and technically formidable performances that closed the deal. Too bad the institute segregated all the contemporary music into one afternoon. But it was some recital.

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