



Chopin Notes

Chopin Society of Atlanta Quarterly

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Upcoming Events:

Chopin Recital

Kevin Kerner, winner of the 1990 International Chopin Competition in Warsaw, and Piazzoforte Quintet
Program: Chopin and Piazzolla

October 21, 2007 5:00 pm
Roswell Cultural Arts Center
Roswell, GA

For tickets, call 770.641.1260
or online at www.chopinatlanta.org

Fourth Annual Chopin's Life
and Works Competition for
Atlanta Youth

November 10, 2007
Piano Works, Duluth, GA
Registration deadline
October 15. See page 2.
Details online at
www.chopinatlanta.org

Annual Fundraising
Dinner and Concert
November 3, 2007 6:00 pm
Details on page 2

Chopin Recital
Alberto Nose, piano
March 16, 2008 7:00 pm
Roswell Cultural Arts Center
Roswell, GA

Concert tickets are always
discounted for members of the
Chopin Society of Atlanta. To
become a member, join online at
www.chopinatlanta.org or
call 770.663.0620

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Crossing Over the Borderline

Interviews with Kevin Kerner, soloist of the *Piazzoforte* ensemble and Grzegorz Frankowski, its leader.

by Bożena U. Zaremba

Bożena U. Zaremba: Why are you attracted to Piazzolla's music?

Kevin Kerner: It's hard to know why a particular kind of music touches you the way it does. A few years ago, when I was living in Poland with my family, my wife was quite interested in taking tango lessons. I don't dance at all, but I thought I'd just see what it's like. So I learned to dance, rather badly (*laughs*), but we had a lovely time. And then we saw that there was concert being presented at the Cracow Philharmonic Hall called Tango Bridge, and we decided to go, since we enjoyed the music we danced to. We went, and I was so deeply affected by this music that I went backstage to introduce myself to the artistic organizer of the event, Grzegorz Frankowski, who was the double bass player there. He already knew who I was and invited me to actually perform some of Piazzolla's music.

Has the collaboration with *Piazzoforte* changed you as an artist?

KK: It definitely opened my musical horizons. I started to encounter music that I frankly had no experience playing, and I have had to develop skills that are used by jazz pianists, like improvisation.

I had to listen very carefully to performances of Piazzolla's music with the bandoneon, because the piano part is often taking on the bandoneon part and I had to find ways so that the piano actually reflects the sound of the bandoneon. This all has been really fascinating for me. I do feel that in the last couple of years it has had an overall effect on the way I listen to any music. It gave me freedom and greater power really to explore music in the ways that I was not aware of.

During your American tour in fall you will play Piazzolla side by side with Chopin. Sounds like music from two different planets.

KK: Well, these are composers that do appear on the surface to have nothing to do with each other—different generations, different life experience, different culture. And on the other hand they are connected more than seems possible. There is something similar about both these composers in the passionate way they explore the human condition.

What do you find most fascinating about Chopin?

KK: He is so multifaceted and connected with so many aspects of music. His works are put together magically—anything, from a tiny prelude or a mazurka to a sonata. And the colorful sense of sound that inspired so many composers after him—that is truly irresistible. And it is

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Photo: Daniel Szubelak

"Chopin Society of Atlanta...makes exquisite programming choices."

~ Pierre Ruhe, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

Essays About Marc Laforet's Recital

At the latest Chopin Society of Atlanta concert, which hosted the renowned French pianist **Marc Laforet**, we held an essay contest for the students who attended the recital. The theme of the contest was: "Imagine that one piece you heard at Marc Laforet's recital is a part of a movie soundtrack. What would the story be about?" The best three essays were each awarded a \$25 Barnes & Noble gift certificate. The best two essays are published below (slightly edited for space and clarity).

Mr. Laforet's piano concert was awesome. The main thing I paid attention to was the Sonata No. 2 in B-flat Minor. It was like a little story. In the beginning, a man had an important mission and he got stuck in a storm. In the middle, when it calmed down, he rode back home safely. Then, just after he dried off, his manager called him and he was on his way on another mission. Then a blizzard started, but just like last time he arrived home safely and finally got to relax. Besides trying to think of the songs as stories I also learned that Chopin's music isn't always slow and romantic, but can be fast and strong. I was lucky to be there and listen. —Kathryn Jian (3rd Grade)

One of the pieces I heard at Marc Laforet's concert was Polonaise in E-flat Major, Op. 22. It was a very



Photo: Bożena U. Zaremba

Marc Laforet signing autographs after his recital. On the right - Honorable Philippe Ardanaz, Consul General of France in Atlanta.

beautiful rendition. I liked this piece most because it was upbeat and rhythmic. The music was fast and lively! I think this musical piece would make a great soundtrack for a "Tom and Jerry" movie. "Tom and Jerry" movies are about a cat (Tom) and a mouse (Jerry). The cat and the mouse like to play tricks on each other and chase each other. The Tom and Jerry chases involve sharp moves, turns and fast action. An upbeat audio soundtrack like the Polonaise

complementing visual effects would make for a great movie! —Sitara Shirol (3rd Grade)

The theme for the next recital's essay contest is "**Which of the Chopin's pieces heard at Kevin Kenner's recital did you like best and why?**" We invite all students (up to 18 years of age) attending the recital to take part in the contest. For details, go to www.chopinatlanta.org.

Chopin's Life and Work Fourth Annual Atlanta Youth Competition

The Chopin Society of Atlanta is inviting children 18 and younger to participate in the Fourth Annual Atlanta Youth Chopin Competition, dedicated to Chopin's life and music. The application deadline is **October 15, 2007**. The written part involves writing an essay or a short story about the life and work of Frederick Chopin. Written essays must be submitted by mail to Chopin Society of Atlanta, 540 Morton Mill Court, Alpharetta, GA 30022 by October 22. The repertoire for the performance competition should include one or two pieces of Chopin's original music of different forms, played from memory. The performance

competition will take place on **November 10, 2007**, at Piano Works, in Duluth. Contestants in the performance competition must take part in the written part as well. For details, please go to www.chopinatlanta.org, contact the Chopin Society of Atlanta at info@chopinatlanta.org or call Ping Xu at 770.619.5290.

Please let us know if you would like to be a sponsor or if you would like to establish a special award in your name.

Annual Fundraising Dinner and Concert

The Chopin Society of Atlanta will hold its Annual Fundraiser on November 3, 2007, starting at 6:00 pm. This will be a great opportunity to meet other members of the Chopin Society and prominent members of the Metro Atlanta community. The guest of honor will be Congressman Tom Price, U.S. House of Representatives. The honored guests will include Honorable Philippe Ardanaz, Consul General of France, Honorable Shoji Ogawa, Consul General of Japan, Oscar Primmelles, Vice President, Mastec (2006 guest of honor), and Mariusz Brymora, Culture Counselor from the Embassy of the Republic of Poland. The piano recital will feature Piotr Folkert, who will perform on an antique Erard Piano from 1836. For more information, please call 770.663.0620 or e-mail info@chopinatlanta.org.

deeply expressive of inner emotions.

Yet it is very difficult to play.

KK: It is difficult. There are not a lot of pianists that can play Chopin completely convincingly. It is so easy to encounter readings of Chopin that are either over-sentimentalized or over-virtuoso, or overly-academic and colorless. It's very hard to find that perfect balance. There are constant contradictions in his music, Classicist and Romanticist. Somehow he defied all the attempts to define and limit him, and that makes the interpretative process very difficult.

The year 1990 marked your success at the Chopin International Competition and other prestigious competitions. What did you learn from that experience?

KK: I learned how futile it is to trust the competition process of comparing pianists, how arbitrary it can all be to put numerical values on an interpretation. In one competition you can win the top prize and in the next one you might not pass the first round. Ultimately you have to look inside yourself and know for yourself that what you have inside you has value and it is rather irrelevant of what other people think about that. It has been very hard to develop that trust in my own work as an artist, and winning that big competition launched me on a journey of freeing up what is within me. My whole desire to explore other areas of music, like tango, has been a part of that journey.

Piazzoforte is based on a string quartet.

Grzegorz Frankowski: Right, with a double bass added, not so much as to make the group bigger and louder, but to balance the wider facture of the piano. The double bass gives it all a certain contour.

Double bass, at least in jazz ensembles, give the harmonic base and the pulse. Isn't it especially important in Piazzolla's music?

GF: That is a good question because when we play Piazzolla, the bass is electrically amplified. This shocked people at the beginning, an electrically amplified instrument side by side with the acoustic ones! However, since in Piazzolla's music, besides classical elements, there is tango and jazz, exposing the bass in the rhythmic section puts emphasis on the latter elements.

On the one hand you are a classical musician, performing with classical ensembles, and on the other hand you are a founder of musical projects and experiments that border on pop, jazz, and classical music. How does this all work together?

GF: I wish that classical musicians were versatile and had broad horizons, as in the old times. Music academies should train musicians to perform a wide spectrum of music genres from different music epochs. Specialization, not only in music, is a curse of our times, and musicians limit themselves to only one kind of music.

Photo: Maria Hübner



But isn't it a matter of some inclination or talent for a particular genre?

GF: Surely, but there are still a lot of musicians who do not fall into strict categorization. They will play a classical concert and then a jazz or Argentinean tango composition. It is risky, but I have always admired those classical musicians who are flexible and can perform different genres of music.

What fascinates you most in tango?

GF: In classical tango – sensuality; in tango nuevo – versatility. This music is engaging, sensuous, and saturated with emotions. To all of that, Piazzolla added counterpoint, Romantic phrasing, twentieth-century harmony, and elements of improvisation.

Many critics emphasize the erotic aspect of this music, but love in tango, although full of sensuality, is unfulfilled.

GF: I'm glad that I don't have to explain this stereotype, which resulted from confusing eroticism with sensuality. Eroticism entails fulfillment, and tango is characterized by its absence. Tango unveils elements of sensuality but does not give ready answers. That is the attribute of great art, which activates our imagination and sensitivity to beauty.

Someone described tango as "the pulse of the society." It has the authenticity and life force of, let's say, American jazz and blues. I don't think that Polish music has an equivalent. Even though Chopin drew so much from Polish folk music, it's still parlor music.

GF: Chopin is like a dream. It's a childhood memory, a disguised allusion to Polish folk music. Tango, on the other hand, is distinguished by its urban character. Also, tango is definitely unlike the rest of South American music. It originated in the districts of Buenos Aires where only a tiny percentage of the population was Argentinean. The core of the society which established that environment and that culture was made up of immigrants from Italy, Germany, Spain, or Poland. Piazzolla himself claimed that it was not Argentinean music but "Buenos Aires music." 90 percent European. The Argentineans would like to see this music as an embodiment of their national identity, but the fact that tango is so well played by the Europeans proves that this music is understood by musicians all over the world.

... and by the audiences.

GF: Yes, of course. Piazzolla divided his more than 70 years of life equally among Argentina, the United States, and Europe. This music has a cosmopolitan spirit.

Bandoneon, so intrinsically associated with tango, also came from Europe.

GF: Bandoneon was created in Germany to serve in the liturgy in place of the organ, so its origin is in the church. Then it was brought by emigrants to Buenos Aires and served as an accompaniment on the streets and in brothels, which is characteristic of the tango's beginnings. Then it returned to the world's musical scene as tango's icon. I am working on a project to revive the bandoneon as a solo instrument and bring it back to the church, which is difficult because it carries so much baggage. I want to show

Crossing Over the Borderline

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that there is still transcendence in this music.

What is the general reaction to your experiments?

GF: Since I have played borderline music for a while, I have gotten used to judgmental responses by different audiences. When we received the Fryderyk 2006 (Polish Grammy Award) for the best chamber music recording in 2006, I encountered opinions that this is not really chamber music but pop. On the one hand, people connected with tango accuse us of drifting away from traditional tango, and on the other hand, jazzmen point out that there is too little improvisation or bold arrangements in our performance. So we have our friends and foes, and depending on where we play, we are perceived either as those who break the rules of classical music or those who have not matured to play jazz. I leave the problem of labeling to the critics. For me, the most important thing is that people respond to this music with their emotions and come to us after our concerts to talk about what they feel. ■

Conversation with Grzegorz Frankowski translated by Bożena U. Zaremba. To read the **complete interviews**, go to: www.chopinatlanta.org. The artists' websites: www.kevinkenner.com, www.frankowski.art.pl.

Just for Kids...

How to Behave at a Piano Recital

By Bożena U. Zaremba

Decide if the statements about recital manners below are TRUE or FALSE:

1. In the case of a piece that has parts (like a sonata) you clap your hands only after the whole piece, not after each part.
2. If you get hungry, you can eat any time you want, but make sure nobody can see you.
3. If you are late or need to leave during the recital, enter or leave during the applause between pieces, and make sure you do not slam the door or disturb the artist or the audience in any other way.
4. While the pianist is playing, you can shout loud comments, like "Great!" or "Wonderful!"— as long as you do not get up from your seat.
5. You can answer a cell phone call any time as long as you have a classical music ring.

Answers:

1. True
2. False (Eat or drink only during an intermission, at a designated area.)
3. True
4. False (You are welcome to make such enthusiastic comments only during the applause at the end of the piece; during the playing of the piece, refrain from talking.)
5. False (Make sure your cell phone is turned off or is in silent mode.)

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