

Christopher O’Riley

(updated June 2009– please discard any previous version)

From his unforgettably sublime interpretations of the standard Classical canon to his groundbreaking transcriptions of the finest pop repertoire from Radiohead, Elliott Smith and Nick Drake, pianist Christopher O’Riley has redefined the possibilities of classical music. He performs year ‘round, criss-crossing North America offering a variety of programs including standard Classical repertoire as well as his interpretations of contemporary and pop repertoire.

Christopher O’Riley’s poetic gifts and captivating virtuosity have made him one of the most important and versatile pianists performing before the public today. He enjoys a thriving concert career with a singularly broad repertoire ranging from music of the English Renaissance and French Baroque periods to new works of today’s leading composers to such non-classical forms as the tango. Mr. O’Riley had already earned critical and popular renown for his technical ability and artistic vision in adapting works from the more conventional Classical canon before applying this talent to the compositions by contemporary writers like Drake, George Harrison, Radiohead and Smith, following the lead of Beethoven, Bartok and others who likewise often interpreted the popular works of their day in performances for their noble patrons. O’Riley has performed his transcriptions at major jazz festivals in Istanbul, London, San Francisco and Sicily as well as on a tour of the U.K. He’s appeared at the Belfast Festival and in January 2006, he debuted in Australia, at the Sydney Festival in a program entitled “Shostakovich meets Radiohead” as well as with Pablo Ziegler in “Los Tangueros” followed by solo concerts in Adelaide and Brisbane.

In November 2004, Mr. O’Riley toured the U.S. with the world-famous Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Orchestra visiting 10 cities in 2 weeks, playing Bach, Mozart and Liszt concerti. He performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl, and has soloed with the Minnesota, Pittsburgh, Atlanta and Baltimore Symphony Orchestras. He has collaborated with an illustrious group of conductors including Marin Alsop, Hans Graf, Neeme Järvi, Yoel Levi, Andrew Litton, Leonard Slatkin, John Williams, Hugh Wolff, David Zinman and Bobby McFerrin.

An enthusiastic advocate of new music, Mr. O’Riley has twice participated in the annual “Absolut Concerto” concerts at Avery Fisher Hall, a brainchild of O’Riley’s fan in the 80’s, Andy Warhol, premiering works by Richard Danielpour and Michael Torke. In 1999-2000 he performed Michael Daugherty’s “Le Tombeau de Liberace” with the Detroit Symphony and with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, both in St. Paul and on tour. He recently premiered works by Aaron Jay Kernis, including his piano quartet, “Still Movement with Hymn,” (also recorded for Decca’s Argo label) and the “Superstar” Etude No. 1, inspired by the pianism of Jerry Lee Lewis.

From early in his career, Mr. O'Riley was honored with many awards at the Leeds, Van Cliburn, Busoni and Montreal competitions, as well as an Avery Fisher Career Grant. Among his many solo recording releases are a Scriabin disc for Image Recordings and an all-Stravinsky disc on Elektra Nonesuch, featuring "Three Movements from Petrouchka" and Mr. O'Riley's first foray into transcriptions with his own versions of "Apollo" and "Histoire du Soldat." Other recordings include an RCA Victor Red Seal release of French repertoire for flute and piano with Sir James Galway; his audacious debut disc of music of Busoni, including the monumental 'Fantasia Contrapuntistica'; a disc of Ravel's solo works; a recording of Beethoven Piano Sonatas; a collaboration with cellist Carter Brey entitled "Le Grand Tango"; and the premiere recording of P.D.Q. Bach's "The Short-Tempered Clavier" by the fabled composer-satirist Peter Schickele. O'Riley has also recorded music of John Adams, Todd Brief, Richard Danielpour, Robert Helps and Roger Sessions.

Christopher O'Riley has taken his unique vision to both traditional classical music venues and symphonic settings, as well as to entirely new audiences on the radio, at universities and even clubs. As host of the most popular classical music radio show on the air today, National Public Radio's top-rated *From The Top*, he works and performs with the next generation of brilliant young musicians, demonstrating to audiences, with humor and a lack of pretense, that these young artists are as characterful and diverse in their personal lives as they are in their music-making. Two years ago, PBS launched the weekly television series *From The Top from Carnegie Hall* featuring O'Riley as host. The Emmy-Award second season and upcoming third year seasons are directed by the Emmy winning Gary Halvorson, known for his direction of the hit TV comedy series *Friends*, *Everybody Loves Raymond* and the *Drew Carey Show*, and for the high-definition simulcasts to movie theaters for a series of New York Metropolitan Opera productions.

Christopher O'Riley studied with Russell Sherman at the New England Conservatory of Music. He makes his home in Cleveland, OH. His radio show can be found on-line at www.fromthetop.org. His personal website is at www.christopheroriley.com.

Critical acclaim:

"O'Riley's greatest accomplishment, however, is the ability to introduce young fans of contemporary artists like Radiohead and Smith to classical music. And by the looks of the cultural center audience, he is succeeding in his attempt to locate a midpoint between genres that often struggle to find a common ground."

-The Chicago Tribune

“He certainly brought imagination and talent to the endeavor.”

-Los Angeles Times

“Whether executing a lithe dance on the keys in its fastest passages or pounding out those sprawling, complex chords that only the notoriously large-handed Rachmaninoff could play with ease, O’Riley was outstanding throughout.”

-Pioneer Press

“But the Liberace tribute was O’Riley’s main event. Its four movements traversed boogie-woogie funk, a funeral tango, a dreamy, rippling solo cadenza derived from notes of the bottom of Liberace’s swimming pool, and a hyperbizarre finale that combined Shrine convention orientalism with showy romanticism in the style of Rachmaninoff. O’Riley delivered it all shamelessly and just about flawlessly, with great fluidity and even a touch of Liberace’s insouciance.”

-San Antonio Express

“Infectious passion.”

-Los Angeles Times

“...O’Riley played so delicately that he seemingly left no fingerprints on the keys, yet his melodies sung out with sweet clarity...”

-The Washington Post

“The playing was spirited a nuanced in feeling—and scrupulously polished in phrasing and articulation, tone and texture.”

-Pittsburgh-Live

“...O’Riley has found a tantalizing way to bridge pop and classical, and judging by the ovation he got from the nearly full house, he has already won converts.”

-The Chicago Tribune

“With unblinking virtuosity, [O’Riley] captures the band’s signature contradiction: encountering something exhilarating...and feeling simultaneously somehow unwell.”

-Rolling Stone

“[O’Riley’s] adaptations, Lisztian in scope and technical demands, were ingenious, especially when one considers the density and harmonic intrigue of the originals. Such is the risk of being on the cutting edge, but O’Riley still rules. If I had a lighter, I would have flicked it.”

-The Oregonian

“The graying of audiences at venerable music institutions has been a worrisome trend for quite some time, and solutions are hard to come by. In a culture that favors ephemeral sensation over works that have met the test of time, classical organizations struggle to attract new, young listeners. Christopher O’Riley is a world-class pianist who has...recorded Scriabin and Stravinsky, and recently toured the United States with the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Orchestra playing Bach, Mozart, and Liszt. The pianist has always been eclectic...yet his passion for Radiohead has given his career a whole new dimension, and he has taken this new

repertoire on the road in a serious way.”

-New York Sun

“O’Riley’s playing is laced with an otherworldly elegance that can’t be duplicated.”

-Spendid.com

“Fans of Radiohead take their love of the band very seriously. Classical pianist Christopher O’Riley, however, has taken his admiration further. O’Riley has recorded two full albums of Radiohead transcriptions for solo piano. O’Riley’s tastes are famously diverse, and his repertoire ranges from Beethoven to new music by Aaron Jay Kernis to collaborations with tango pianist Pablo Ziegler...with this kind of genre fluidity, playing each style undoubtedly influences the other in his work.”

-Billboard Magazine

“What makes these versions so satisfyingly far from being “covers” is their density and complexity of musical thought and their outright refusal to portray the originals by mimicking them. Like Radiohead’s songs, O’Riley’s versions are easy to get stuck on. Once this CD makes it into your player, it may stay there a while. Listen to “Sail to the Moon” and you just might.”

-Bay Area Reporter

“O’Riley’s integration of oceanic momentum and melodic and harmonic beauty is not only virtually peerless in piano music but rivals that of the greatest art-rock bands, Radiohead included.”

-The Absolute Sound