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April 15, 2009

MUSIC REVIEW | JOEL FAN

# To Woo the Widest Public, a Pianist Goes Clubbing

By [ALLAN KOZINN](#)

A year ago, not many classical recitalists had cottoned on to the pop world’s method of turning the release of a CD into a live event by way of an informal, celebratory concert billed as a release party. But younger musicians are onto this, and these days they seem to be giving themselves release parties at the rate of two or three every month. You would hardly know the record business was dying.

The pianist Joel Fan took over Le Poisson Rouge on Monday evening to celebrate the release of “West of the Sun,” his new collection of music of the Americas for Reference Recordings. It was a chatty performance, as concerts at Le Poisson Rouge tend to be. Musicians there would rather talk about the music than provide printed programs, and while that approach might not work as well in a concert hall, in a club it slices away the already reduced distance between players and listeners.

Mr. Fan said this was his first club performance, but he had the patter down. What he miscalculated was how much to amplify the piano. It doesn’t need a lot at Le Poisson Rouge: the room is live, and the audience is generally quiet. And Mr. Fan has a powerful touch and produces a big sound. If you amplify too much, as he did, the piano takes on an unnatural glare and boominess.

That said, his playing was the picture of textural clarity in Ernesto Nazareth’s “Vem Cá, Branquinha,” which he played with the sparkle and rhythmic suppleness of a jazz improviser. He brought similar qualities to two works that quote folk themes, Villa-Lobos’s Chôro No. 5 (“Alma Brasileira”), with its gauzy bass and gracefully singing melody, and Margaret Bonds’s “Troubled Water,” a set of bravura variations on the spiritual “Wade in the Water.” And he put the gentler side of his pianism on display in the light-textured chromatic swirl of Dia Succari’s “Nuit du Destin.”

The program’s highlight was the New York premiere of [William Bolcom](#)’s “Nine New Bagatelles,” a set of aphoristic, vividly drawn character pieces, including painterly evocations of playing children and chirping birds. Mr. Fan gave it an agile reading, with delicacy and heft carefully balanced.

And he closed the concert (except for a light Piazzolla encore) with a muscular, rich-hued and at times uncommonly lyrical account of Alberto Ginastera’s Sonata No. 1.

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