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Going Backwards Through Musical Time

Posted By [Stan](#) On October 15, 2013 @ 11:43 pm In [Concert Reviews,International Concerts,Previously Published](#) | [Comments Disabled](#)



United States Saint-Saëns, Chopin, Liszt, Schubert, and Mozart: Joel Fan (piano), Northwest Sinfonietta, Christophe Chagnard (conductor), Illsley Ball Nordstrom Recital Hall, Benaroya Hall, Seattle 11.10.2013 (BJ)

Saint-Saëns: Caprice-Valse, Op. 76, *Wedding Cake*

Chopin: Polonaise-Fantaisie, Op. 61; *Krakowiak*, Grand Concert Rondo, Op. 14

Liszt: *Mephisto* Waltz

Schubert: Overture in D major, D. 590, *In the Italian Style*

Mozart: Symphony No. 38 in D major, K. 504, "Prague"

Programs that go chronologically backwards tend to be particularly entertaining, and this one was no exception. The first half, starting in 1885 with Saint-Saëns's charming piece, was given over to works featuring the piano; it had something of the character of a 19th-century "miscellaneous concert," because alternating with the two works for piano and orchestra came two solo pieces, the Chopin Polonaise-Fantaisie and the Liszt *Mephisto* Waltz.

In all of these, the piano part was dispatched with formidable virtuosity by a pianist I haven't encountered before, the 43-year-old Joel Fan, who was born in the USA to parents from Taiwan. He was well supported in the Caprice-Valse and the *Krakowiak* by Christophe Chagnard and his Northwest Sinfonietta. His unassuming demeanor notwithstanding, Fan is clearly a pianist—and musician—to reckon with, and I look forward to hearing more of him.

After intermission, orchestra and conductor were on their own, and moved from predominantly romantic pieces (unless we count Saint-Saëns as a neo-classicist), by way of Schubert (who I suppose spans classicism and romanticism), to the straightforward and yet so expressively powerful music of Mozart. Schubert's cheeky Rossini take-off was played with much artistry and vigor.

In conclusion, we were treated, for once, to a genuinely complete performance of Mozart's great "Prague" Symphony. Chagnard, who was very much in the vein throughout this concert, showed excellent judgement in observing all the repeats the composer asked for in the three-movement work, including the crucial one of the Andante's exposition, without which the beginning of the development section, robbed of dramatic surprise, degenerates into mere triviality. The orchestra, too, was in tremendous form, with crisp string playing, fine contributions from woodwinds and brass, and some exhilarating thumps from timpanist Matt Drumm: his lusty swings between tonic and dominant in the finale carried irresistible conviction.

Bernard Jacobson

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