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By STEVE SMITH

JOEL FAN

Metropolitan Museum of Art

A New York recital debut is a big deal, even for a musician whose performances here have made him a familiar presence. The pianist Joel Fan, 38, has long been admired in chamber music and orchestral settings, and also plays in Yo-Yo Ma's busy, eclectic Silk Road Ensemble. Unlikely as it may seem, the recital he presented at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on Friday night was his first in the city.

Mr. Fan came prepared with no fewer than four sonatas, two of them -- Beethoven's No. 31 in A flat and Chopin's No. 2 in B flat minor -- cornerstones of the repertory. Those works provided ample evidence of Mr. Fan's probing intellect and vivid imagination, the Beethoven in particular sounding freshly conceived and full of character.

Mr. Fan brought steely power and a feather-light touch to Prokofiev's bristling Sonata No. 3. He seemed to revel in the stormy hues and red-blooded Romantic gestures in Leon Kirchner's compact Sonata No. 3, "The Forbidden," which was written for Mr. Fan in 2006.

Mr. Fan surrounded those works with attractive, colorful showpieces from his very popular 2006 CD, "World Keys," including music by the Turkish composer A. Adnan Saygun; Dia Succari, from Syria; and Qigang Chen, a Chinese student of Messiaen. He was expressive and eloquent in Villa-Lobos's Choro No. 5, "Alma Brasileira."

The program ended with a flamboyant account of Liszt's Concert Paraphrase of Verdi's "Rigoletto." Mr. Fan was recalled for two encores: "Cristal," a slinky tango by Cesar Camargo Mariano, and William Bolcom's dreamy "... la belle rouquine." STEVE SMITH