

Music In the Digital Age Sparks Creation of the Open Source Music Festival

Classical News & Reviews



By Brian Taylor, Contributing Writer, November 10, 2017

Virtuoso pianist Joel Fan, a celebrated champion of new music and member of Yo Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble, is launching the Open Source Music Festival at the Lower East Side's Abrons Art Center on November 16–18. This is a multi-faceted event featuring timely panel discussions exploring creative rights in the digital age, and a day of performances by a variety of contemporary musicians from a variety of musical genres highlighted by the premiere of a suite of pieces called *Couplets* commissioned by Fan.

Audiences are able to purchase an All-Festival Pass providing access to all the events, including the panel and networking mixer, "Digital Rights: Impact of the Blockchain on Music and the Arts" on Thursday, a VIP cocktail reception on Friday, and the day-long Festival Concert starting at noon on Saturday. The overarching concept of "Open Source," as a musical idea comes from Fan's fascination with the tradition of solo piano transcriptions: "On my very first album, I recorded the Liszt Concert Paraphrase of Verdi's *Rigoletto*, which is the Quartet from *Rigoletto* turned into a virtuoso piano piece. Transcriptions have always been a very core part of the solo piano literature."

Music's tradition of sharing material and building upon earlier work can be viewed as anticipating today's modern world: "The fact that we're all now so dependent on our iPhones and Androids, the core of the iPhone is actually open source, which is software that was written not in the old fashioned way, in terms of someone would write something and they don't allow someone to build upon it — open source came about as a reaction against strict copyright rules slowing down innovation. So once that happened, we got this explosion of creativity, and that's really influenced our lives today."

Fan continues, "So this idea of open source, in terms of all these web services that we use, the phones that we use, and all the connectivity that's empowered by open source software, I thought to myself, well, how does this idea relate to the music world? Thereby we get this Open Source Music Festival where we're exploring these kinds of collaborations, the sharing and reinvention of materials, and provide a forum for that.

"It turns out that companies today, they don't use just copyrighted software or open source software, they're using a continuum. Your iPhone has both open source influence as well as Apple-copyrighted components. So I feel like it's a continuum of creativity and of how the creators now have all these different ways to determine how people will license their work products."



Joel Fan; courtesy of Open Source Music Festival.

The festival opens with what should be an interesting panel discussion on Thursday about creative digital rights. Fan explains, “the idea being there that we’re now also in an era beyond just being able to share and remix and all that sort of stuff that’s so interesting, but we’re getting to the era of having all these granular tools for creators to determine where the future rights of someone are later down the line. All this digitization is actually going to benefit people creating any work of art today, whether it’s music, graphic design, regular artwork, or software art. It’s going to empower your future user: are they going to be allowed to redistribute it for free, can they build upon it?”

Fan envisions the Open Source Music Festival as “an umbrella to explore this question. There are no answers, only questions, explorations, and art to be created.” The variety of performers and genres featured in the festival on Saturday will make for a rich day of listening. “The idea behind Open Source is an attempt at community and collaboration, and the feeling that more minds working on different things can lead to better results and that’s part of it. Even the way we’re