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~ John and Mina Perry

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Pianist Joel Fan will bring music by Beethoven, Chopin and contemporary composers from around the globe to San Jose on Sept. 11

By Richard Scheinin / [San Jose Mercury News](#) / Sept. 4, 2010

Pianist **Joel Fan** is a devotee of Bach, Beethoven, Brahms and the like. That's how he was trained, and that's what he remains. And then some: His last couple of albums -- which landed high on the Billboard classical charts -- have fanned out across the globe, showcasing music by the likes of Ernesto Nazareth of Brazil, and Dia Succari of Syria.

When [Fan performs Sept. 11 in San Jose](#), music composed by Nazareth and Succari will be on the program, alongside works by Beethoven and Chopin. His recital, presented by the Steinway Society, reflects his experiences as a member of Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble, a group devoted to exploring connections among musical traditions around the world.

Speaking by phone from his home in New York, Fan, 41, talked about his musical journeys.

Q Describe your experiences with Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble.

A Great experiences -- I would say "mind-blowing" experiences. The inspiration for my last two albums is clearly from Silk Road: How do you take this experience, this exploration and cultural way of looking at music, and put it into a solo piano context?

Q Tell me.

A When you have music and musicians playing instruments from different cultures, the funny thing about it is it all makes sense. You hear a line or you hear a harmony, and you make a connection. The handiwork and the emotional connection is there. It's global, it's universal, and that's what's fascinating to me. It's given me, as a pianist, a willingness to explore music from different cultures. No creation or innovation exists in a vacuum. We're all dealing with inspirations from other people and thinkers, whether it's in philosophy or science or music. And one of the big themes right now is the way information is globally shared and the way collaboration can happen instantaneously. We're all connected around the world, wherever we are, even if we don't want to be. Not only the world's information is at your fingertips; the world's music is, too.

Q When you sit down at the piano, what's your mission?

A The goal is to provide a great evening of entertainment. This music is art, but it still needs to entertain -- to entertain intellectually, to entertain by playing dazzling stuff and to entertain by challenging the audience and opening ears.

Q OK, then what?

Become a Fan



acher, Leon Fleisher, used to describe a performance as a



Joel Fan, pianist

t, and you're just floating. And you bring the audience on this journey, this exploration of musical styles, of rhythm and sound on the piano -- and of emotion. That's the bedrock.

The great pianists -- they all do go for a similar thing, that sense of transporting from beginning to end, and for a sense of inevitability, that "this is the way it was supposed to be." Even though every performance in some sense is an improvisation, a creative act unlike any other, it's also inevitable. Especially when you're playing a piece by Beethoven or Chopin.

Q You're playing Beethoven and Chopin in San Jose. Let's hear about some of the other composers on the program.

A Composers write by looking at the world around them and gathering information. My old teacher Leon Kirchner, who wrote a sonata for me (Kirchner's music is not on the San Jose program), was actually inspired by physics and science; at Harvard, where he taught, he was around it all the time. Now Margaret Bonds, whose music I'll be playing in San Jose, is obviously drawing from her own rich background, which included a very rich repertoire of Negro spirituals, to create her piece "Troubled Water."

Q Ernesto Nazareth?

A He was known as the Scott Joplin (the American "King of Ragtime") of Brazil. And this is a Brazilian tango that I'll be playing, not a long work, just a great way to open a program.

Q Dia Succari?

A He's a Syrian composer, and he writes in more of a Middle Eastern harmonic language, though this piece is also a little like Ravel. There's a French influence. There's also a moment of enlightenment in the middle of the work, where it just stops and you listen to the silence. It's kind of like when you've reached the apex of understanding. Imagine throwing a ball in the air, and when it reaches its highest point it just stops and hangs there. That's the effect.

Q You're going to pull that off?

A We'll see!

[Joel Fan, piano](#)

Presented by the Steinway Society

When: 7:30 p.m. Sept. 11

Where: Le Petit Trianon, 72 N. Fifth St., San Jose

Tickets: \$30-\$45, \$5 discount for students and seniors, \$10 student tickets available at door 30 minutes before program; 408-286-2600, extension 23; [www.steinwaythebayarea.com](http://www.steinwaythebayarea.com)

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