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Zimerman has strokes of, quite simply, genius

By Tim Smith, The Baltimore Sun
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English

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Apr. 10--It's hard to explain true, transcendent artistry, to identify its roots or define its parameters, but I think I know when I hear it. And I heard it more than once during the weekend-long Piano Celebration presented by the Shriver Hall Concert Series.

The festival, crammed with performances and lectures, was created to give the 40th anniversary of the series, Baltimore's finest importer of classical music talent, an extra charge. The result could not have been more galvanic.

The artistic peaks came in two events, both of them historic, at least locally - the first two-hand recital in Baltimore by the almost legendary Leon Fleisher since the 1960s, when use of his right hand was hindered by focal dystonia; and the Baltimore debut of Krystian Zimerman, ranked by many among the world's greatest pianists for the past three decades.

If anyone wants to propose that Zimerman is actually the greatest pianist living today, you won't get any argument from me. Not after his concert Friday night, a revelation of interpretive imagination. Make that interpretive daring. No, genius. That's the only word for it.

The evidence came right at the start of his program, with Mozart's C major Sonata, K. 330. The way the Polish pianist toyed with harmonic resolutions in the score - he's quite a cadence-teaser, this guy - added immeasurable elements of tension, eloquence and, in the finale, refreshing wit.

In Beethoven's Pathetique Sonata, which Zimerman dedicated to "all those in prison because someone wanted to be the law instead of obeying the law," he created a taut drama, underlined by chords of shattering tonal and expressive weight. The famous slow movement unfolded unsentimentally, but with keen poetic insight; the finale had explosive impact.

Zimerman's wonderfully personal approach to the music of Chopin yielded intense pleasure in the F minor Ballade, while his refined sense of coloration served him well in

Ravel's Valses nobles et sentimentales. His sensational technique and communicative skills were put to equal tests in a mesmerizing account of the thorny Piano Sonata No. 2 by important 20th-century Polish composer Grazyna Bacewicz.

Had the Piano Celebration gone no further than this, it would have been a memorable experience. Zimerman cannot come back soon enough.

Fleisher's appearance Saturday night also proved richly satisfying. With the help of Botox injections, he has been able in recent years to put his right hand back into some pianistic service - enough to enable him, as he did here, to deliver a noble, incisive, time-suspending performance of Schubert's Sonata in B-flat.

The warmth of tone and the sense of seasoned reflection behind every phrase yielded a revelatory performance of this expansive, valedictory work.

On the first half of his recital, Fleisher focused on counterpoint via pieces by Bach, the supreme master of the style, and a retro example by Stravinsky. The latter's spiky Serenade got an intense workout, while Bach's imposing Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue inspired remarkable clarity, vitality and expression.

A few smudges in a boldly outlined account of Bach's colorful Capriccio, subtitled "On the Departure of His Most Beloved Brother," proved insignificant. Transcriptions of "Sheep May Safely Graze" and "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" were gracefully limned.

There may still be physical limitations on Fleisher's technique, but none on his musicality. He remains a source and force of pianistic wisdom.

On Saturday afternoon, the action shifted from Shriver Hall to the Baltimore Museum of Art auditorium, where Kit Armstrong, looking half his 14 years, gave an impressive demonstration of his current talent and a promising taste of his potential.

He applied a remarkable palette of tonal shadings to Ravel's Sonatine, making the music sing and surge. His recital also contained carefully considered Debussy Preludes and generalized, but engaging, performances of Mozart, Beethoven and Chopin.

Yesterday afternoon, back at Shriver, **Fazil Say** gave the penultimate Piano Celebration recital (last night's finale was devoted to jazz pianist McCoy Tyner).

A mechanical malfunction prevented Say from performing the main draw on the program, a duet version of Stravinsky's Rite of Spring, one part pre-recorded, one part live. He substituted Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition, played full-throttle and sometimes very effectively.

He started with a big, gutsy performance of the Bach/Busoni Chaconne. His over-the-top, hardly flub-free version of Beethoven's Appassionata approached the level of jazz in its spontaneous phrasing and rhythmic impulsiveness. I'm sure it appalled some listeners, but I found it striking and exhilarating

Best Sellers-Audio

By The Associated Press

1,075 words

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[Associated Press Newswires](#)

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Weekly charts for the nation's best-selling recorded music as they appear in next week's issue of Billboard magazine. Reprinted with permission. (Platinum signifies more than 1 million copies sold; Gold signifies more than 500,000 copies sold.):

Top Classical Albums

(Compiled from a national sample of sales reports collected, compiled and provided by SoundScan)

1. "Roger Waters: Ca Ira," Byrn Terfel/Paul Groves/Ying Huang. Sony Classical.
2. "The Flying Dutchman," Andre Rieu. Denon.
3. "Sacred Songs," Renee Fleming. Decca.
4. "Tchaikovsky: Violin Concerto," Joshua Bell/Berlin Philharmonic (Thomas). Sony Classical.

Sony Classical.

5. "Opera Proibita," Cecilia Bartoli. Decca.
6. "Black Earth," **Fazil Say**. Naive.
7. "Wagner: Tristan Und Isolde," Various Artists. EMI Classics.
8. Soundtrack: "Master and Commander." Decca.

Orchestra (Morricone). Sony Classical.

9. "Golijov: Ayre, Berio: Folksongs," Dawn Upshaw & Andalucian Dogs. DG.
10. "The Essential Joshua Bell," Joshua Bell. Decca.

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CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEW

The Arts/Cultural Desk; SECTE

Harmony and Abstraction, And Bach Found in Details

By BERNARD HOLLAND

444 words

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[The New York Times](#)

Late Edition - Final

5

English

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Mostly Bach programs like **Fazil Say's** at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on Friday night bring the composer and the word "abstract" closer together. Bach's music, deeply religious and driven by a strong humanity, is not abstract in the cooler sense of that word. The abstraction lies in the adaptive use to which his musical architecture can be put -- the way it can be picked up, put in strange places and still remain itself.

Mr. Say, a young Turkish pianist, gave a big audience what added up to a series of transcriptions. The E major French Suite and the Italian Concerto were as Bach's original scores say they are, but playing them on a ringing modern Bosendorfer piano constituted a transcription all its own. Liszt's pianofication of the A minor Prelude and Fugue for organ (BWV 543) and Mr. Say's own arrangement of the famous organ Passacaglia put new superstructures over the old frameworks.

The closest the great man came to losing his identity was in Busoni's version of the Chaconne for solo violin. The 19th century was under the impression that the missing harmonies had been lost or simply left undone. We have since figured out that Bach wanted us to hear them inside our heads. Busoni lets Bach's solo lines peep out from time to time, but too often they are trapped underneath concrete-like textures and virtuoso flurries, fighting for breath.

Almost any pianist can play Bach with feeling. Mr. Say is such a good Bach performer because he devotes a large part of his heart to detail. Bach's scores rarely came with phrase marks, making performers their own musicologists, choosing when, for example, to separate adjoining notes or when to join them smoothly together. Mr. Say's care in these matters creates opposing voices with distinct and consistent personalities.

Then, having taken the music apart, he puts it back together, and in a way that we would never know he had given any of this a thought. Some of us could do without the vocal coos, arm-waving, torso-twisting and face-making but they seem part of the deal. One certainly can't complain about the sounds coming out. Mr. Say's only technical struggles were with his Passacaglia arrangement. At the end, he played Brahms's almost painfully intimate three pieces from Op. 117, all with appropriate simplicity and reticence.

Photo: **Fazil Say** performed a program focused on Bach on Friday night. (Photo by Jennifer Taylor for The New York Times)

A Stop-and-Start Season Opener for the BSO

26 September 2005

The Washington Post

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A bus breakdown made the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra half an hour late for the start of its first full season at the Music Center at Strathmore on Saturday, but it apparently did nothing to dampen the musicians' enthusiasm for a program with a distinctly American flavor.

In fact, the concert opened at its height, with a sparkling reading of George Gershwin's "An American in Paris." Yuri Temirkanov, beginning his final season as BSO music director, emphasized the work's angular jazz rhythms and gave the brass and percussion - areas of BSO strength -- a real workout.

Musicians and audience got a workout of a different sort in Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." Turkish pianist and composer **Fazil Say** often leaned far back, driving the Steinway as if it were a low-slung sports car with only an accelerator pedal. The orchestra played gamely, but tempos and rhythms between soloist and ensemble did not always match, and it was sometimes unclear who was conducting whom. Still, Say's expressive and unusual approach was memorable.

The final work on the program, Dvorak's Symphony No. 9 ("From the New World"), was less so. It's a thoroughly Bohemian work if you take away the spirituals and "Three Blind Mice," more expansive than the intense No. 7 or the sunny No. 8. But Temirkanov was in a hurry, with no repeat in the first movement, a too-quick Largo and some distracting rubato. The third and fourth movements worked best, with the brass again outstanding.

The BSO is scheduled to take this program on its Oct. 19-29 tour of Western Europe, where one hopes the buses are in good repair.

-- Mark J. Estren

QUOTES

“For Rhapsody in Blue, the BSO brought back the same Turkish-born soloist who lit a fire under the score here with Temirkanov three years ago. Fazil Say proved even more incendiary this time. His playing had an on-the-edge spontaneity, a sleeves-rolled-up intensity ...Say acknowledged a sustained ovation with a brilliantly played encore - his own brooding, imaginatively colored composition, Black Earth.”

Baltimore Sun 24.09.2005

Wonderboy.

Die Welt, September 2004

...as if obsessed. One, who arches like a panther over the keyboard, ready to jump - mixing Classics and Jazz..Der Tagesspiegel, Berlin, August 2004

A triumph? Without any doubt.

Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace, Juni 2004

Magician of the piano

Die Presse Wien, Mai 2004

Emotion without limits...everything superbly played.

Der Standard Wien, Mai 2004

The most surprising piano recital I've attended...Bags of modern verve...

Financial Times London, Mai 2004

...brings out the energy from each piece of music.

Asahi Shinbun, Tokyo, April 2004

Impeccable Classical credentials.

Chicago Sun-Times, März 2004

Bold and formidable.

New York Times, März 2004

Beethoven's C minor concerto is, thanks to Fazil Say the highlight of the evening...a congenial and creative musician

Süddeutsche Zeitung, März 2004

The latest in a grand line of applause-inciting pianist-composers

The Gramophone, März 2004

Tight-rope piano playing of incredible virtuosity, humour and joy in taking risks

Saarbrücker Zeitung, Januar 2004

Soldout Concertgebouw enthusiastic.

De Telegraaf, Amsterdam, Januar 2004

Fazil Say steals the show with the Concertgebouw Orchestra, so that you will never

forget his name: Fazil Say, Fazil Say, Fazil Say!
De Parool, Amsterdam, Januar 2004

Outstanding pianist.
Main-Post, November 2003

Best sense musical rhetoric
Tagesanzeiger Zürich, November 2003

Un phénomène prodigieux au piano.
La Provence, Avignon, Oktober 2003

Fazil Say belongs to the since long extincted line of great piano virtuosos who had been also composers.
Berliner Morgenpost, Juni 2003

A marvel at the keyboard.
TZ München, März 2003