

## THE AMERICAN PIANO

### Lectures and Workshops by Joseph Horowitz

*JH has delivered versions of the following lectures at the Aspen Festival, Bayreuth Festival, Gilmore Keyboard Festival, and Jerusalem Music Center, as well as at Eastman, Harvard, Juilliard, New England Conservatory, Oberlin, UCLA, UC-Berkeley, University of Indiana, University of Michigan, and dozens of other colleges, universities, and conservatories.*

### THE FUTURE OF THE PIANO IN CONCERT (lecture and discussion with recorded examples)

More than anyone else, Franz Liszt, who said "*le concert, c'est moi*," institutionalized the solo piano recital. That was in the 1830s. Pianists such as Liszt and Clara Schumann (in Europe), and Anton Rubinstein and Hans von Bulow (in Europe and the United States), promulgated a canon of masterpieces by composers living and dead, beginning with Bach and Beethoven. Liszt and Rubinstein were themselves important composers, as were Busoni, Paderewski, and Rachmaninoff, among other master pianists. In the course of the twentieth century, a new species of **performance specialist** took over: Horowitz, Rubinstein, Arrau, Serkin were examples of pianists who neither composed nor (in the latter stages of their careers) espoused contemporary composers. Rather, they specialized in interpretation of canonized repertoire, and at least paid lip service to a new sub-specialty: versatility of style.

What comes next? In our new century, the performance specialist will increasingly seem a twentieth century anomaly. Pianists will be challenged to find something else to give, whether in terms of novel repertoire and new formats, or (returning to an older model) composition and improvisation. Already we see a rebirth of significant pianist/conductors (Eschenbach, Barenboim) and conductor/composers (Salonen, Boulez). "The American Piano" is itself a strategy of renewal. So is Steven Mayer's campaign to bring Art Tatum into the concert repertoire. So are Anthony de Mare's excursions into theater and video.

What are the implications for pedagogy (for conservatories and schools of music)? For professional careers?

### THE CLASSICAL MUSIC CRISIS AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT (lecture and discussion with recorded examples including historic recordings)

A capsule history of classical music in the United States shows that concerts a century ago generated an automatic sense of occasion. The early Boston Symphony offered a rare opportunity to hear a great orchestra. There were no radios or recordings with which to hear orchestras at home. Contemporary music by Wagner and Dvorak was of pressing interest, as were such local composers as Chadwick and Foote. Boston's orchestra was its cultural signature. Similarly, Anton Rubinstein touring the United States in the 1870s was a revelation, and so was his repertoire of Beethoven sonatas, Chopin, and Schumann.

At its apex, at the end of the nineteenth century, classical music in the U.S. focused on an anticipated native repertoire of sonatas, symphonies, and operas. The most prominent musician in New York City was a *composer*: Antonin Dvorak. After World War I, however, America's musical high culture was preponderantly focused on **the act of performance**: great conductors and orchestras. Arturo Toscanini became the first non-composer pervasively to symbolize "great music."

Today, in "post-classical" times, contemporary composers (such as John Adams) have abandoned the ivory tower, and classical music is challenged to interact more fruitfully with popular and non-Western arts. To the extent that living composers can find a niche, to the extent that orchestras, opera companies, and presenters can mediate with the culture-at-large, classical music can be revived.

**THE AMERICAN PIANO (lecture and discussion with recorded examples and examples at the keyboard)**

Classical music in the United States has focused disproportionately on European masterworks, to the neglect of native repertoire. The relative failure of American keyboard repertoire to penetrate the mainstream has been especially unjust. Whatever one makes of the quest for the great American symphony or great American opera, or of the relative paucity of important American chamber music, there exists a great American piano sonata: the *Concord*, by Charles Ives. Far afield from Ives, Charles Tomlinson Griffes' Sonata, an exercise in New World diablerie paralleling Scriabin abroad, and Aaron Copland's modernist Piano Variations, with its stark sonic pillars and skittering urban rhythms, are emblematic American piano landmarks too little heard.

Louis Moreau Gottschalk, the first American pianist to establish an international reputation, was a cosmopolitan hedonist raised on Caribbean fare in New Orleans – and the first in a long line of virtuoso composer/pianists inspired by the black vernacular, an amazing list also including the likes of Scott Joplin, James P. Johnson, Zez Confrey, George Gershwin, and Art Tatum.

Henry Cowell was internationally celebrated as a renegade, pounding the keys with his fists. His signature piece is *The Banshee*, in which strings scraped and plucked produce echoing cries and wailings. More recently, composers as varied as Elliott Carter, John Adams, and Fredrick Rzewski have produced important keyboard works only an American could have written. On the margins of American keyboard music are such unforgettably idiosyncratic figures as Anthony Philip Heinrich, the “Beethoven from Kentucky,” whose *A Chromatic Ramble of the Peregrine Harmonist* requires the pianist to sing while rambling “among the flats and sharps.”

Taken as a whole, American classical music may betray an absence of lineage and continuity. But this same fragmentation may be read as a protean variety: of composers who imitated Europe or rejected it; who preferred German music or French; who viewed the popular arts as a threat or as a point of departure. To a surprising degree, American composers have partaken in the diversity of American music as a whole. It is, in the aggregate, a defining attribute.

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*Mr. Horowitz is also available to lecture on three more specialized topics in music about which he has written definitively:*

**PIANO COMPETITIONS:** *history, problems, strategies of reform*

**WAGNERISM IN AMERICA:** *the Wagner movement of the late nineteenth century as a peak moment for American classical music; its distinctive New World message of religious uplift; its special appeal to shackled women of the Gilded Age*

**MUSIC AND THE GILDED AGE:** *a lecture for Americanists challenging prevalent notions of “sacralization” and “social control”*

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*Mr. Horowitz is also available for the following workshop:*

**WORKSHOP: NEW PROGRAMING STRATEGIES**

An interactive opportunity for performers, educators, and/or presenters to explore specific alternatives to standard concert formats, tailored to individual artists and audiences. Also: packaging, fund-raising, promotion, marketing.

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