

<https://phillylifeandculture.com/2018/08/12/concert-review-charles-abramovic-recital-for-the-philadelphia-young-pianists-academy/>

PHILLY LIFE & CULTURE

Philly Life & Culture

- Where the reviews are phresh! -

August 12, 2018



Concert Review: Charles Abramovic Recital for the Philadelphia Young Pianists' Academy

By Margaret Darby

Charles Abramovic, Chair of keyboard studies at Temple University, is an experienced teacher whose gift for interpreting modern music is extraordinary. The program he created for his Philadelphia Young Pianists' Academy was almost an essay on the history of piano composition.

The two outer pieces were written by composers born in 1938. The opening piece was *Variations (1964)* by Canadian composer Jacques Hétu, which had been made famous by Glenn Gould's recording in 1967. Mr. Abramovic used pedal to create marvelous effects. He managed to bring out single melodic lines and let them vibrate untrammelled by dampers as he played more dryly articulated notes around them.

The counterweight to the Hétu variations was *Three Rags from "The Garden of Eden"* by American composer William Bolcom, also born in 1938. This came after Abramovic's rather stiff but accurate version of Jellyroll Morton's *Deadman Blues* and *Shreveport Stomp*. Of the three Bolcom rags, the one with depth and drama was *The Serpent's Kiss*, during which Abramovic wrung out every inch of expressivity and nuance in the score.

Two other modern compositions were presented, a fairly Schoenbergian style *Fantasy for piano (2005)* written for Mr. Abramovic by his wife, composer Heidi Jacob. The second, by Abramovic's former student Brian Ciach, was a rather heavyweighted loud stomp called *Fourth Sonata, "The Great Scream"*.

To his credit, Ciach inserted some interesting effects by having the performer pluck piano strings. Mr. Abramovic favored using a squeegee for this rather than bare fingers and the buzzing tunes he got from the strings were the highlight of the piece.

The concert included three well-known classical composers. Beethoven was represented by the enigmatic *Six Variations on an original theme, Opus 34*, which he began working on in 1802. An experimental effort in key relations, the six variations are all in different keys. Abramovic gave a beautifully quiet and measured version of the theme and then proceeded to go too fast on many of the variations.

The *Fantaisie in F minor, Opus 49* by Frederic Chopin came out in a blast of speed and muscle, even the quiet funereal opening, which made one think of a young student pianist, painting a rather muddy picture in rushed notes. But, as if to demonstrate a contrast, Mr. Abramovic played the purest and most piercing melodic phrases of all in the Scriabin *Five Preludes, Opus 16*. His ability to balance the softest of quietly uniform and superbly phrased arpeggiated bass figures against blooming notes of the arcing melodies provided the strong but gloriously controlled effect that had been missing in the Chopin. Ending the evening in a light note was the encore by Nadine Dana Suesse, *American Nocturne*. This 40s style piece seemed to lack the substance of the other compositions, but it seems the way of the classical world these days is to be diverse in style, and with this encore, the teacher rounded out a broad gamut of styles for the future pianists participating in the Philadelphia Young Pianists' Academy to contemplate.

{6th Annual Piano Festival Philadelphia Young Pianists' Academy, featuring Charles Abramovic, August 11, 2018, Academy of Vocal Arts, 1920 Spruce Street, Philadelphia. PYPA.info}