

Porter Center Concert Review: Jeremy Denk

by Jason DeCristofaro
Arts and Life Writer

Many great pianists have graced the Porter Center's stage, like Olga Kern and Stephen Drury, just to name a few. Jeremy Denk is equal in caliber to these artists with his sublime technique, musical intuition, and ability to make the instrument truly speak. The entire concert (which lasted for almost two hours), only consisted of two selections, but they are masterpieces in the piano literature as well as the classical repertoire. The first selection was Charles Ives "Sonata no. 2, (Concord, Massachusetts)," which was followed after a brief intermission by Beethoven's "Sonata No. 29 in B-Flat Major (Hammerklavier)." Before each piece, Denk did the audience a great service by explaining the musical significance of each piece. His description of the Ives was succinct, educated, and casual, a testimony to Denk's abilities not only as a musician but a performer.

All the movements are landmark achievements in the pantheon of American music, but the last movement was my personal favorite selection of the whole evening, and seemed to do the best job of evoking the transcendental spirit Ives set out to create when writing this sonata. Ives named this last movement, "Thoreau," as a tribute Romantic American writer of the same name who described the spirituality associated with nature and its beauty. A variety of techniques, based in traditional as well as more innovative, modern harmonies (of which Ives was one of the first composers to utilize), gave the piece a truly impressionistic quality. The natural beauty of the New England countryside that Thoreau described in his writings was aurally apparent in the quartal harmonies and whole tone scales of this movement, which, coupled with stark contrasts in dynamic, recalled the often beautiful and unpredictable qualities of the natural world.

Following intermission, the Beethoven "Piano Sonata no. 29," was performed. I found this work to be fitting with the concert, as Beethoven, like Ives, was an innovative spirit pushing the boundaries of the music of his time. If Ives was the granddaddy of American concert music, than Beethoven was the forefather of the Romantic era of classical music in the 19th century. This sonata is considered by many critics and performers to be the best of all the Beethoven piano sonatas (the composer

himself even considered it to be his best sonata). Incidentally, it is also one of the most difficult sonatas to perform, especially in the second movement, where there is an extremely high metronome marking. This didn't faze Denk at all, who musically shaped the phrases of even the most ornery and rapid passages. In the fourth movement, there is a fugue, that in the hands of an amateur, would have sounded like a jumbled cluster of scattered notes. In Denk's masterful hands, however, the listener could still hear each thematic idea with the clarity Beethoven intended. Another aspect of performing Beethoven that can be difficult for many, but was executed with precision by Denk, is the observation of subtle dynamic changes and articulations. The sforzandos, subito pianos, and shadings of staccato and legato touch on

the keyboard were all performed with world class accuracy. Finally, Jeremy Denk had some of the best phrasing of any pianist I've ever heard. Even in the most difficult sections of the Beethoven and Ives, he was able to bring out the intended effect of the written grand pauses, breath marks, and (especially in the case of the Ives), the rhythmically complex figures.

While the works Denk performed are considered masterpieces, they are also musically sophisticated and often not the most accessible works for audiences, even audiences of classical music. It was Denk's explanations of the pieces before he played as well as his attention to detail in the performance of each work that validated his place as one of the best pianists alive today.

Public Service Announcement:

SAVE OUR HANK!

by Dabney Farmer
Contributor



Is King of the Hill going to end?

For most of you adult cartoons lovers your first reaction to this news is probably NOOOOOOO!!!

But unfortunately, in their infinite wisdom, Fox decided that after the following thirteen new episodes the show will be wrapped up. The show's creator Greg Daniels is just too busy working on "The Office". Part of the problem is Hank Hill is just too clean cut and mild mannered, avoiding fart jokes and other crude but popular humor in order to compete with fans of Family Guy, The Simpsons and American Dad. It will be missed.