



from
Young Concert Artists, Inc.

Jean-Frédéric Neuburger, Pianist

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By Stephen Neal Dennis

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Few connoisseurs of wine would overlook the opportunity for an early tasting of what promises to become a legendary burgundy after a necessary maturation. Nature can be assisted by the vintner, but should not be pushed. **Last night, piano devotees heard at La Maison Française a young pianist who can best be described as France's response to Sviatoslav Richter. Only 20, Jean-Frédéric Neuburger is already a spectacular pianist of awesome technical facility who moves easily from Bach to Chopin to Ravel and finally to Liszt within a single concert.**

It should be said at the outset that Neuburger's most astonishing work was the Ravel transcription of Ravel's own "La Valse." As an orchestral work, "La Valse" is a piece with many surprising contradictions, false momentums, and dashed impulses. Instead of a logical development, it demonstrates an instinctive emotional mixture of lyricism and primitive bravura. The piano transcription is devilishly difficult, but Neuburger coped deftly with all requirements and set the audience buzzing in the lobbies of La Maison Française during intermission.

The concert opened with Bach's English Suite No. 2 in A minor. A suite of a Prelude and six dances, the piece responds well to intentional dash and fire but must be played with absolute precision. Though some early music theoreticians may still be fighting a rear-guard action on the issue of whether it is suitable to play any Bach music on the piano, that argument seems senseless in the presence of a pianist who can seize a major Bach piece and make it his own. At times Neuburger's tempos seemed a bit fast, but rapidity never became camouflage for a flawed technique that needed to be obscured.

Neuburger's Chopin is certainly less "dreamy" than many listeners have become accustomed to. Under his hands, Chopin becomes a bit pugnacious as well as chromatic, while undulating rhythms move from hand to hand. Neuburger offered both a Ballade and a Nocturne (and the Revolutionary Etude as a sizzling second encore at the end).

The necessary intermission was followed by Liszt's Sonata in B Minor of 1853, a work in a single "movement" of thirty minutes. Although the audience may have expected the Liszt to become Neuburger's "show-off" piece, that had been the role of the Ravel. Instead, **Neuburger found within the Liszt piece majestic drama and created long, broad, sweeping melodic lines that would be impossible for a pianist of lesser talents worried about getting all the notes right.**

Embassy Series Artistic Director Jerome Barry has promised a new emphasis on outstanding young pianists. If Jean-Frédéric Neuburger is an example of the delights in store for Embassy Series patrons during the 2007-2008 series, it will be risky to wait before purchasing tickets for certain remaining piano concerts.