

Benjamin Hochman

KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

November 9, 2004

Pianist Benjamin Hochman shines in glorious recital

By C.J. Gianakaris
Special to the Gazette

Sunday evening at the Well-spring Theater, 24-year-old Benjamin Hochman established his credentials among the finest of

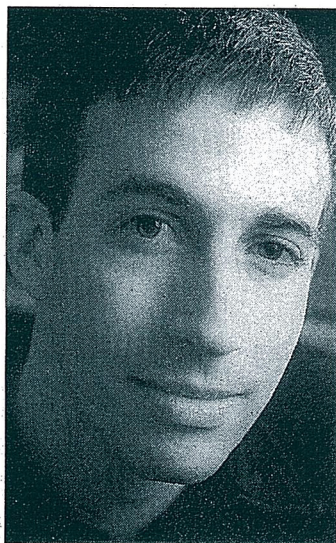
Concert review the Gilmore Rising Stars artists. Hochman shared outstanding attributes with others before him, such as impeccable technique and abundant musicality. But his approach to music-making reflects his individualism by letting the music speak for itself, with little personal intrusion by the artist.

Four diverse selections made his case for transparency. Schubert's winning Piano Sonata in A Major (D. 664) was Hochman's lead-off piece. Familiar to most audiences and wildly popular, the sonata might have emerged a pleasant rehash of fetching melodies.

But not Sunday, when Hochman made everything look incredibly easy, thanks to eloquent grace and elegant style.

Hochman did not believe in excess movement or gesture, keeping listeners' full attention focused exclusively on the music. He displayed an exceptional touch that permitted speed when required along with exquisite pianissimos that never veiled melodic articulation.

Octave scales emerged flawlessly in the opening, as did the smooth left-hand accompaniment for the right-hand



Benjamin Hochman

melodic line. The affecting "andante" section never lost track of the sweet melody, while the jolly last movement, "Allegro," featured flawlessly polished left hand octave runs.

After a clean rendering of the brittle, brief Six Little Piano Pieces, Op. 19, by Schoenberg, Hochman won the audience's interest with impressive playing of Debussy's "Estampes" (Prints). Exhibiting another entirely different musical "voice" here, Hochman painted the three tone images of "Estampes" in lush pianistic coloring. Debussy's love of oriental musical sounds was splendidly con-

veyed in Hochman's delivery of "Pagodes" (Pagoda). Schubert, Schoenberg and now Debussy — Hochman was equally adept in expressing the essential musical heart of each.

To conclude, Hochman turned to Brahms' Piano Sonata No. 3 in F minor, Op. 5. Composed when Brahms was 20 years old, this ambitious work combines numerous sonorous fabrics into a musical quilt. Flamboyant, excessive and at moments bombastic, the sonata mirrors an inventive composer-in-the-making, trying out specimens of his unique musical genius.

In the beginning "Allegro" movement, Hochman did not flinch from the high drama and intense romanticism. But never did his playing appear out of control. Octave runs were pure and clean, while pianissimos remained strikingly articulate.

As thoughtfully performed by

Hochman, Brahms' second section, "Andante," expressed a strong spiritual quality that alternated with quasi-lullaby passages. Hochman played at his best here, maintaining a calm meditative ethos to create a cohesiveness not always evident in Brahms' score.

In the bracing "Scherzo" a playful carnival spirit — strongly reminiscent of Robert Schumann's writing — alternated with occasionally meditative passages. The versatile Hochman performed here with impressive suavity. The Finale broke loose with abrupt starts and stops, as well as scampering musical lines.

Again, Hochman's command of the music kept it under control. In a Lisztian whirlwind finish, Hochman brought out the fast, thrilling culmination of Brahms' energetic, if not always coherent, rhapsody. Hochman's performance stands with the best heard here of this work.



KIRSHBAUM DEMLER & ASSOCIATES, INC.
711 WEST END AVENUE SUITE 5KN NEW YORK NY 10025
212 222 4843 TEL 212 222 7321 FAX WWW.KIRSHDEM.COM