

Benjamin

Bach and Mozart

Pasatiempo

‘This week is a dream’

Craig Smith | The New Mexican

Reached a week and a half ago in New York, Benjamin Hochman said he was looking forward to his Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival debut. It was easy to see why. During the festival's first 10 days, the young Israel-born pianist was not only slated to perform Mozart and Bartók with colleagues including the Miami String Quartet, violinist Cho-Liang Lin, and clarinetist Todd Levy, but he also was scheduled for a solo recital of one of his favorite composers, Bach.

"This week in Santa Fe is a dream," Hochman said by phone from his studio, anticipating the event. "There's nothing more I could ask for: Bach and a Mozart concerto — one of the best, I think, the E-flat Major K. 449."

Hochman performed the Mozart with the Miami July 19 and July 20 in Los Alamos and Santa Fe; he plays Bartók's *Contrasts* on Sunday, July 23, and Monday, July 24, at the Lensic Performing Arts Center with Lin and Levy. His solo Bach recital is Saturday, July 22, in St. Francis Auditorium, and features the Prelude and Fugue in B Minor from the first book of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, the Partita No. 5 in G Major, and the English Suite No. 3 in G Minor.

"Bach has been a big inspiration as long as I can remember," Hochman said. "From the time I started playing music, it's consistently appeared on my recital programs, almost every recital program." Some of his teachers have been especially interested in Bach, too, and have given him their aid — notably piano virtuoso and scholar Richard Goode and the late Edward Aldwell, who died in a tragic accident at the end of May.

Hochman said that Aldwell, who taught theory and harmony at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, "was a wonderful inspiration for Bach. I'm dedicating this recital to his memory. He encouraged me to pursue this repertoire. Every now and then, I would come and play for him. He would have wonderful things to say" — and what Aldwell focused on was interpretation rather than technique.

Non-musicians might wonder what a teacher who doesn't concentrate on technique would say to a student. The answer is, much more than you might imagine. After all, the essence of coaching — in sports, cooking, mountaineering, or music — is to observe, listen, support, and suggest. If you do that and the student is willing to respond, you have to correct only occasionally, and nag almost never.

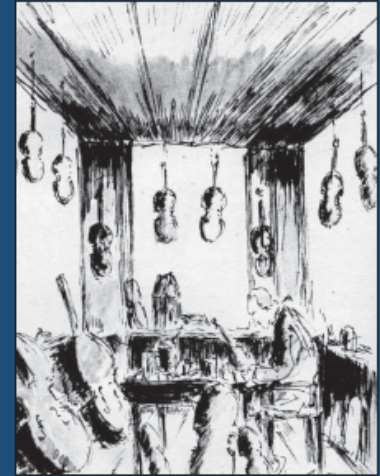
What makes one mentor-pupil relationship thrive and another fail, Hochman said, is "the chemistry between teacher and student. With Ed Aldwell, it was his very sharp intelligence and his experience as a performer, combined with his experience as a teacher. I think his background in harmony and theory added to it. He was very profound and very simple and direct.

"Some teachers are good for some people; others are less good. I've been very lucky also with Richard Goode and Claude Frank, who are such wonderful human beings as well as such amazing musicians."

Hochman, who graduated from Curtis in 2001 and went on to earn a master's degree in 2003 from the Mannes College of Music in New York, began piano study at 6. His family had no professional musicians before him, he said, though they all love music.

"By chance, I had a woman who took care of me in the afternoons when my parents were working," he said. "She taught me to play a couple of folk songs on the piano, and I kept going." Nor did he have to be forced to practice. "Not at all — I loved it from the beginning!" Hochman said. "There were times when I was a teenager I was little bit rebellious, but I've always been very connected to [music]."

THE SANTA FE CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL



Benjamin Hochman rehearsing with violinist Jaime Laredo in Cincinnati last year

Courtesy Union Chamber Music Festival

