

Benjamin Hochman



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Pianist has light, poetic touch

by Melinda Bargreen

CONCERT REVIEW

Thursday night,
Benaroya Hall, Seattle
By Melinda Bargreen
Seattle Times music critic

The pleasure of discovery is an important part of concert-going, and Seattle Symphony audiences have this opportunity in the current subscription program with conductor Jun Märkl and young pianist Benjamin Hochman.

Hochman, an Israeli-born artist who is making his Seattle debut with these performances, chose the Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 1 to demonstrate his remarkably poetic touch at the keyboard. He played the opening movement with nimble, clean arpeggios and kept the music light, creating an almost velvety sound in

descending scalar passages.

The first-movement cadenza must be one of the most extraordinary cadenzas Beethoven ever wrote, moving through all sorts of modulations in an extended solo that seems almost as long as the rest of the movement. Hochman gave it a freshness and spontaneity that sounded as if he were improvising.

Märkl, who made a great impression here as a Seattle Symphony guest maestro last year, gave careful attention to the soloist, giving Hochman every advantage in accompaniment that was clearly scaled to anticipate his every move. Märkl faced a greater challenge, however, in the opener: the world premiere of the new "Manchay Tiempo" ("Time of Fear"), composed by Gabriela

Lena Frank.

The new piece, rhythmically complex and tricky, must have taken some substantial rehearsal. It is an atmospheric work based on a recurring nightmare of Frank's youth (her ancestry is both Peruvian and Jewish), and there's a sense of escalating doom and flight in the music. It opens with eerie strings over rumbling percussion, creating some beautiful effects, but after awhile the repertoire of musical gestures seems a bit narrow.

The program finale was the Brahms Symphony No. 1, a mighty work for which Märkl has an obvious affinity. He eschewed bombast and grandiosity in favor of a lighter, faster-moving approach. Sometimes things moved a little too fast, as

in the very brisk third movement, where the tempo took awhile to settle in. The graceful performance was much enhanced by some spectacular brass playing, lovely wind solos and Märkl's own skill at creating drama through dynamics.

Melinda Bargreen:
mbargreen@seattletimes.com

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SEATTLE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA repeats at 8 tonight; 2 p.m. Sunday is a "Musically Speaking" program minus "Manchay Tiempo," \$15-\$62 (206-215-4747 or www.seattlesymphony.org).



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711 WEST END AVENUE SUITE 5KN NEW YORK NY 10025
212 222 4843 TEL 212 222 7321 FAX WWW.KIRSHDEM.COM