

SECTIONS

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Youthful virtuosity

 By **Jessie Riggins** Tue, Nov 15, 2016

Pianist Charlie Albright proved the future of classical music is bright to an enthusiastic Lawrence audience as part of the Lied Center's Pavilion Chamber Series.



Pianist Charlie Albright returned to Lawrence, Kansas last Sunday afternoon, a decade after his debut as a first prize winner in the International Institute for Young Musicians (IIYM) Piano Competition, held in

Lawrence each summer. Since then, Albright has won numerous piano competitions nationally, made his debut with world-renowned orchestras, and collaborated with artists such as Yo-Yo Ma, Joshua Bell, and Bobby McFerrin. Needless to say, the exuberant Lawrence crowd welcomed him back with open arms, their hearts full of pride.

The afternoon concert, held inside the Lied Center's Pavilion, was less formal, and Albright encouraged the audience to applaud whenever they felt, rather than waiting until the end of multi-movement pieces (although, audience members were perhaps too polite to oblige.) The young pianist took the time to introduce each piece before performing it, and **his excitement was contagious** as he gave personal accounts of why he had included each particular work in his program, the historical significance of the piece, and what he loved about it most.

Beginning the concert with two impromptus from Schubert's Op. 90, **Albright's command of these early-Romantic works was breathtaking.** Smart programming placed the shimmering No. 3 before the turbulent No. 2. Next, Janáček's passionate and dissonant *Sonata 1.X.1905* showcased his **virtuosic playing**, as the flowing melody crashes into total chaos. This piece, while one of the best of the afternoon, was lost on the somewhat older audience, as many shifted uncomfortably during its most dissonant sections, the reaction Janáček was likely reaching for in this work about a Czech worker killed during a protest in 1905.

Then, **Albright dazzled the crowd with an improvisation, something his concerts are becoming well-known for.** He asked audience members for four random notes; and they responded with B-flat, D, A, and E-flat. The

pianist then developed a melodic line from those four notes, and transformed them into a rich, flowing melody, followed by a dramatic march, and many other different moods and themes. This virtuosic showcase exemplified his early years, when he had learned to play the piano by ear, but also showed his command of the instrument, and his ability to use it as his own voice. Finishing out the first half was an interesting Schulz-Evler arrangement of Strauss' *On the Beautiful Blue Danube*.

The second half of the program was Chopin's *Études* Op. 25. After a somewhat clumsy introduction, Albright discussed each of the twelve movements, giving the specific skill needed in each, and the common names ("Winter Wind," "Left-Hand Étude," "Study in Octaves," etc.) His gentle touches on No. 1 ("Aeolian Harp"), gave an ethereal sense to the piece, and was balanced well against the brilliant No. 3, which he perfectly described as "galloping horses." It is interesting to hear this work in succession, and the variety of styles between each movement gave Albright a chance to showcase his complete mastery of the piano. The No. 5 Étude, known as the "Wrong Note Étude," and described by Albright as a "drunk guy on his way home," has a remarkable middle section with lyrical and flowing melodies. This piece was the best executed of the set, and is a fitting analogy for Albright's personality: a little awkward, but shining with captivating lyricism. After two standing ovations, Albright returned to the stage with Arcadi Volodos' spectacular arrangement of Mozart's *Turkish March*.

When performing, Charlie Albright is a commanding presence on stage. His beautiful lyricism is unmatched, and his exhilarating youthfulness brings a fresh excitement to classical music, and a bright anticipation of what is to come next in his career.

REVIEW:

Lied Center Pavilion Chamber Series

Charlie Albright, piano

November 13, 2016

The Lied Center of Kansas

1600 Stewart Dr., Lawrence, KS

For more information, visit <http://lied.ku.edu>

By Jessie Riggins



Classical and Jazz Contributor

Jessica E. Riggins, originally from Columbia, Missouri, is a very active voice in the local music scene. She is the Board President of Mid America Freedom Band and a member of the Mighty Mo Jazz Combo. She holds degrees from the University of Central Missouri (M.A., M.M.) where she studied Music History and Literature. Jazz has always been a passion for Jessica, and she was the only female member of UCM's top jazz band during her time there. In her free time, Jessica enjoys studying the lives, music, and accomplishments of Kansas City's own jazz masters.