

ALFRED BRENDEL

PIANIST

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Mon, Mar. 19, 2007

CONCERT REVIEW: Master pianist Brendel communes with the composers in exquisite Berkeley recital

By Georgia Rowe

It was an astonishing moment -- toward the end of his solo recital Sunday afternoon at Zellerbach Hall, pianist Alfred Brendel, playing the central Adagio movement of Mozart's K. 457 Piano Sonata in C minor, seemed to immerse himself completely in the music. The nearly 2,000 people in the crowd might simply have vanished; the building itself could have crumbled into dust. It was just Brendel and Mozart, in the kind of intimate communion audiences rarely witness onstage.

Now in the sixth decade of an extraordinary career, Brendel continues to amaze, refine his artistry and reaffirm his status as one of the world's great interpreters. The continued growth of this 76-year old master is the best argument imaginable against early retirement.

Presented by Cal Performances, Sunday's recital found the Austrian-born, London-based pianist performing works by Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert. Each received the kind of elegant, unadorned performance that audiences have come to associate with Brendel's name.

Brendel clearly believes that music makes its own rules and establishes its own architecture. He defers to the composer, a practice often dishonored by today's up-and-coming keyboard sensations. When you hear Brendel in performance, it's easy to come to the conclusion that the others are merely posturing.

Mozart and Haydn served as the twin pillars of the recital, with the latter's 1771 Sonata in C minor starting the afternoon. Brendel's playing was note-perfect: clean, articulate, with an unerring sense of rhythm and dynamics.

Never, though, does he allow technical prowess to dominate. His is always an intimate rapport with the music, and he seems to shed light on everything he plays. Beethoven's Op. 110 Sonata No. 31 in A-flat major, with its two sublime ariosos, came next in a brilliantly luminous reading; Brendel's playing was of the highest order, its beauty of tone and poetic sensibility always in service to the composer's voice.

Two Schubert Impromptus from the composer's Op. 142 -- the No. 1 in F minor and No. 3 in B-flat major -- also demonstrated the pianist's gift for color and shading; the No. 1, with its rippling right-hand arpeggios, glowed with a sweetly melancholic air. No. 3 moved from dark to light -- with a million hues in between -- in a good-natured performance suggesting that sentiment is not necessarily a bad thing.

And oh, the Mozart. The outer movements of the K. 457 sounded fleet -- even zippy -- but never rushed. The Adagio, as already noted, seemed to float outside of time. Brendel has often said he wants the composer, not himself, to be the focus of any performance he gives. Here, he certainly achieved his goal.

Colbert Artists Management Inc.

111 West 57th Street, New York, New York 10019
(212)757-0782 - Fax (212)541-5179 - West Coast (858)794-0182
E-mail: NYColbert@ColbertArtists.com