

ALFRED BRENDEL

Pianist

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Brendel delivers musical truth in Gates performance Pianist sells out 1st Denver appearance in 30 years

By Kyle MacMillan

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Review

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Alfred Brendel does not have the magnetic personality or populist appeal of cellist Yo-Yo Ma, who joined the Colorado Symphony for a special concert Tuesday evening.

But what the 74-year-old pianist lacks in star power he makes up for with depth of understanding and sheer force of expression that few other keyboard artists can match.

That became clear Wednesday evening, as Brendel made his first Denver appearance in 30 years, presenting a sold-out recital in Gates Concert Hall under the auspices of the Friends of Chamber Music.

Throughout the program, it was impossible not to be aware of the pianist's amazing technique. But he had a way of deflecting attention from such skills, making sure they were never an end in themselves but a means to communication.

Rather than trading in the sometimes easy shallowness of pyrotechnics and pizzazz, Brendel came off as a kind of font of musical wisdom. If he wasn't delivering the musical truth, it surely was a musical truth.

The program opened with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Nine Variations in D major on a Minuet by J.P. Duport, K. 573. Keeping his approach suitably clear, simple and direct, Brendel did not try to over-interpret this unpretentious work.

Then came Robert Schumann's "Kreisleriana," Op. 16, one of the evening's highlights. Many people know this piece, but this enthralling, multilayered performance put a new face on it, broadening its scope and giving it enhanced weight.

In his hands, it was an ever-shifting, constantly contrasting musical kaleidoscope, with fast sections played with almost manic impetuosity and slow sections suffused with compelling unease.

Paralleling the Variations on the first half, three of Franz Schubert's "Moments Musicaux," D. 780, opened the second half. Brendel gave rich dimension to these musical miniatures, investing each with a surprising emotional wallop.

Rounding out the program was a wonderfully distinctive, highly effective take on Ludwig van Beethoven's Sonata No. 15 in D major, Op. 28, "Pastoral."

Colbert Artists Management Inc.

111 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019

Tel: 212.757.0782 • Fax: 212.541.5179

E: nycolbert@colbertartists.com

Web: <http://www.colbertartists.com>