

# ALFRED BRENDEL

Pianist

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### Brendel performs on a higher plane

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By PHILIPPA KIRALY

From a critic's angle, some concerts (a very few) are a penance to sit through, most are well worth hearing and a child's handful are sublime.

Pianist Alfred Brendel's recital at Benaroya Hall Sunday afternoon was sublime.

Eat your hearts out, young performers: those who think they must appear in red satin shirts or sequined gowns, and fuss at the instrument with waving arms or tossed locks; those who think they must make their personalities felt.

Brendel wears a plain suit. He walks out on stage -- slightly bent as though his back hurts him -- and sits down; and the applause had better stop right then because he begins to play immediately.

At that point, Brendel the person fades nearly to the vanishing point. Oh, he is visible, all right, sitting quietly, his hands rippling easily over the keys, his attention seemingly on a far corner of the stage ceiling away from the audience. But Brendel compels attention to the music, not himself.

Presented by the Seattle Symphony, he performed three works constituting many components of differing mood: Mozart's Nine Variations in D major on a Minuet by J.P. Duport, Schumann's "Kreisleriana" with its eight variations, and Schubert's six "Moments musicaux." He finished with Haydn's Sonata in C Major, Hob.XVI:48.

Brendel easily could have been playing three different pianos. For Mozart and Haydn, both of whose works were composed in 1789, the difference between legato and articulated notes was clear but not emphasized. One was so fluid and creamy it was hard to remember the piano is a percussion instrument, and the other so light and even, quicksilver, that he seemed hardly to touch the keys. It was pure music to the ear: eloquent, profound or carefree by turn.

In Schumann's work of half a century later -- during which the piano evolved rapidly to a much more powerful instrument -- a cheerful abundance of notes sounded easy and relaxed, introspective here, exhilarating there; while Brendel provided Schubert's small gems with moments of musing, drama and Bach-like orderliness.

An almost capacity audience listened with respect and acclaim. The beauty of the two encores, a Schubert impromptu and one of Bach's chorale preludes, brought a lump to the throat. Sublime, indeed.

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