



Everything Jersey

The Star-Ledger

Piano fest in Princeton

Recitals paired up with weeklong symposium

Friday, July 14, 2006

BY BEN FINANE
For the Star-Ledger

CLASSICAL

Describing American composer William Bolcom's "Garden of Eden" Suite, pianist (and novelist) Janice Weber pithily summarizes the work as "the fall of man told in ragtime."

Weber will play "Garden of Eden" in concert on Thursday as part of the third Golandsky Institute International Piano Festival, which opens Sunday in Princeton. The festival presents wide-ranging recitals underscoring pedagogue Edna Golandsky's passion for contemporary music and jazz -- as well as for people who think out of the box, like Weber.

Weber, a Cliffside Park native, says she's excited to be part of the Golandsky Festival because she will be presenting a rich program that she just finished touring in China, one that she really "owns."

"There's such a difference between playing one program 10 times and playing 10 programs once -- which can be the curse for a lot of pianists in my position," Weber says.

Weber's program pairs Bolcom's suite with another 20th-century American piece, Lowell Liebermann's Third Sonata. "Seams go through the piece," Weber says of the Liebermann work. "So even if you don't like contemporary music, there's a lot to cling to."

With the decline of the romantic pianist-composer from Chopin to Rachmaninoff, today's pianists owe it to composers to play contemporary music, says Weber, who has recorded Leo Ornstein's music for Naxos.

"A lot of times, the pieces are so cerebral, they're too complicated, so the audiences can't figure it out," she says. But Weber adds that "people are smarter than you think," and she believes in explaining a new piece before playing it.

Weber's program is not entirely modern. It includes seldom-heard transcriptions of Schubert (by Wilhelm Backhaus) and Wagner (by Liszt), as well as Schumann's G Minor Sonata.

Also on opening night, Kuok-Wai Lio -- a prize-winner born in 1989 in Macau, China -- plays works by Haydn, Schumann, Chopin and Chicagoan Robert Muczynski. Monday's concert features Russian-born pianist Ilya Itin, a Golandsky fest favorite who won the Leeds Competition in 1996. He plays preludes and fugues by Bach and Shostakovich, as well as Rachmaninoff's Second Sonata and Chopin's Third.

Tuesday's concert is titled "Art Song Now" and features soprano Megan Miller, tenor Alex Richardson and pianist Thomas Bagwell in a program that includes lieder by Schoenberg and Berg.

A highlight should be the July 21 event featuring Canadian soprano Dominique Labelle and pianist-composer Yehudi Wyner in a recital of Saint-Saens, Debussy, Ravel and Hahn. The program will also include songs by Wyner, whose piano concerto "Chiavi in Mano" won the 2006 Pulitzer Prize. Wyner will give a pre-concert lecture at 7 p.m.

The festival closes July 22 with a performance by the Herskowitz Rozenblatt Project, a jazz trio led by Montreal pianist Matt Herskowitz.

Golandsky founded her institute in Manhattan in 2003 as a center for pianists to improve their skills using principles set forth by New York pedagogue Dorothy Taubman. The Taubman Approach aims to help players achieve virtuosity without injury. Golandsky helped found the Taubman Institute and served as its music director for 26 years (although the Golandsky Institute and its festival are not sanctioned by Taubman). Parallel to its festival, the Golandsky Institute holds a week-long symposium of workshops and master classes for musicians.

© 2006 The Star Ledger

© 2006 NJ.com All Rights Reserved.