

The Well-Tempered Ear

Classical music interview: Teenage pianist Joseph Hauer discusses his life, the music of Beethoven he will perform at the first free Concert on the Square this Wednesday. Part 1 of 2. | June 28, 2010

By Jacob Stockinger

This Wednesday night, June 30, at 7 p.m., the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra, under the baton of music director Andrew Sewell, will kick off its 27th annual series of Concerts on the Square up around the state Capitol.

The six free Wednesday night concerts, each running about two hours, that run through Aug. 4 feature all kinds of music. (For more information, including food, parking and other programs, visit:

<http://www.wcoconcerts.org/new/cos/concertsonthesquare.php>

But the opening concert this week will feature classical works. And the featured soloist is a student – **Joseph Hauer, an Appleton, Wis., resident who won the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra’s Young Artists Concerto Competition. He will perform the first movement of Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Minor, Op. 37 (1803), the same piece Hauer played to win to the competition.**

Other works on the “Summer Romance” programs includes Mozart’s Overture to “The Marriage of Figaro,” Wolf-Ferri’s Overture to “Il segreto di Susannah,” Edward MacDowell’s “To a Wild Rose,” Rachmaninoff’s “Vocalise,” two Slavonic Dances by Dvorak and two “new” tangos by Astor Piazzolla as well as the love theme from “Cinema Paradiso” by Morricone.

Hauer and the entire concert will be broadcast on Wisconsin Public Television this Friday at 8 p.m. and then again on Saturday at 6 p.m. (In the Madison area, tune in to Channel 21 or Channel 600.)

Given all the interest in classical music and its place in the lives of young people, Hauer (below) recently agreed to an e-mail Q&A with The Well-Tempered Ear. It will run in two parts, today and Tuesday.



Can you tell us some things about yourself?

I'm a kid. I love playing baseball and football, but I'm not big enough to do it "for real." I'm a big Packers and Brewers fan, and I follow the Bucks once they get into the playoffs. I'm very competitive, but I've tried to phase that out of my music life — pretty successfully.

At what age did you start taking piano lessons and how old are you now?

I am 17 years old and I began taking piano lessons when I was 6. However, my mother got me started on piano and gave me lessons until I began studying with a private teacher. When I was looking through my old primer books, I found dates on songs I played going all the way back to when I was 3 or 4. I currently study with Professor Catherine Kautsky at Lawrence University in Appleton.

Was there a particular piece or moment when you knew you wanted to play the piano really well?

Definitely! I went to the Golandsky Institute Summer Symposium at Princeton University in 2008 to learn the Taubman Techniques for piano. The technique had me playing more freely within the first couple of days and I've continued to study and implement the technique so that my playing will eventually be completely effortless. At the Symposium, there was an International Piano Festival.

I heard one of the Golandsky Institute teachers — Ilya Itin — perform a solo recital and I was struck, not just by the power of his music, but by how playing was effortless for him. I decided that if I could perfect the Taubman Techniques, I would be able to perform at such a high level — musically and technically — that a career in piano performance was a definite possibility for me. There was still that "if," though. I hadn't decided to make music my life and career.

The winter following that camp, I competed in a high-school concerto competition and heard a pianist perform in the final round who eliminated my "if." His performance demonstrated to me that even at the high school level, a performer can emotionally affect an audience. His playing affected me so much that I decided I could and would go into a career in music (if he can play like that, I can too).

Do you play other instruments? Is your family musical?

I also play violin (I played the first movement of Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto at my senior recital).

My family is very musical — my older sister just graduated from Lawrence with a double degree in piano and violin performance, my older brother will be a Junior at Oberlin Conservatory majoring in Violin Performance, and my little sister is taking both violin and piano lessons. My oldest brother doesn't play very much any more, but he took piano lessons through high school.

How much do you practice each day?

I generally practice 2-3 hours each day. If I have a performance or competition approaching, my practicing might increase to 3-4 hours a day, with a few 5-6 hour days here and there. I also practice about 1 hour of violin a day during the school year.

What are your plans for college and then a career?

I will attend the Oberlin Conservatory this fall for piano performance. I'll be in the studio of Peter Takács. I want to make a career of performing for the simple reason that I love to play for people. I don't play piano to impress people with bigger, faster, louder.

Technique, musicality, phrasing, and all the elements that go into music are just a means to an end for me. Perfection, too, is just a step along the way, and I've found it is not an absolutely necessary step.

My goal, of each and every performance, is to convey my emotions to the audience. I don't try to make an "original interpretation" of any piece, I try to let the piece play itself. Each piece of music has the potential of calling up specific emotions in the performer and conveying them to the audience; my goal is to allow the process to take place naturally.

That is where the magic of music lies: two people can perform the same piece, both performances can be effective, and yet the performances are completely different. That is because the performers are different people, they have lived different lives and experienced different emotions.

Music is "alive" when the performer lays out his whole life on the stage and lets it come through the music. Forcing a particular interpretation or imitating a different person's performance makes the music dry and boring.

Tomorrow: Joseph Hauer on his other activities, favorite composers, playing the piano and Beethoven

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