



UAPRESENTS STUDENT CRITIC PROGRAM

Menahem Pressler and the New York Chamber Soloists with Richard Stoltzman

Review by Tahirih Motazedian

Seated at the piano bench Menahem Pressler's head barely clears the top of the piano rack. But once his hands begin to traverse the piano keys, one thinks only of his musical immensity. Conspicuous in this performance of Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 17, K. 453* was an unusual alignment of the orchestra, in which the musicians were clustered behind the piano (stage right) instead of encircling the piano in the conventional arrangement. The orchestra musicians coordinated effortlessly and seamlessly, without a conductor, and without even visible cues from their concertmaster. This was an exceptionally sensitive, intimate performance from a very like-minded group of musicians. The orchestra played with a fresh, lovely sound, with no canned sentiments or generic sounds, and no passage or note was taken for granted. They gave the audience the opportunity to feel as if we were hearing this piece for the very first time. Pressler played with sweet, fluid tone, and his interpretation was sensitive and delicate. In echo passages, he somehow coaxed a completely different sound from the piano, as if the sound were emanating from another piano playing in the distance. The only fault in this performance was poor sound balance; the orchestra was occasionally too loud and overpowered the piano in some passages.

Richard Stoltzman's exuberance in the performance of Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto, K. 622* was invigorating. He just couldn't resist playing along with the orchestra's tutti sections, just for sheer joy and love of the music. In contrast to the unusual seating arrangement in Pressler's performance, Stoltzman stood in center of orchestra, as if they were the nest cradling the egg. It was not Stoltzman's most polished technical performance, but it was delightful and highly musical nonetheless. In the quiet sections of the piece, Stoltzman played so softly (not an easy feat on the clarinet) that audience members unconsciously leaned forward in their seats to listen to the exquisite delicate beauty of the sound. Regrettably the seats in Centennial Hall are so creaky and noisy that every minute movement a person makes in their seat is broadcast for the entire hall to hear, creating a cacophony of groaning chairs.

The second half of the concert was a scene of intimate chamber music. Only the wonderfully unique programming of UApresents makes it possible to hear a concert that includes both symphonic works and chamber music in one setting. Pressler and Stoltzman walked onto the stage arm-in-arm, exuding the loving warmth of kindred spirits. Stoltzman quipped comfortably with audience, showing his penchant for entertaining, while Pressler was content to let his friend do the talking. University of Arizona piano professor Paula Fan turned pages for Pressler, which was very unusual. Normally pages are turned by a local music student and *not* by a professor who is celebrated performer in their own rite. But this reviewer happens to know from personal experience that Menahem Pressler is frightfully demanding about his page turning, and Dr. Fan seemed appropriately nervous about her task. The pair performed Brahms' *Sonata No. 1 for Clarinet*

and Piano, Op. 120, and they reveled in the intimate and luxurious melancholy of the piece. Their performance was achingly lovely, and had the effect of drawing listeners into a world of quiet, passionate beauty. Unfortunately the stage was lit too brightly, which cast the artists, seated downstage, into shadow.

The audience wouldn't let this pair of legendary artists leave the stage without an encore, so they performed the second of Gershwin's *Three Preludes*. Every coquettish glissando of Stoltzman's dulcet clarinet drew delighted gasps from the crowd, and this little truffle was the perfect ending to a delicious evening of music.