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Program:

Frederic Chopin - Jazz Impressions of Chopin

- Waltz in Ab Major - Opus 69, No. 1, "l'Adieu"

- Prelude in e minor - Opus 28, No. 4

- Prelude in F# Major - Opus 28, No 13

Ludwig van Beethoven - Piano Sonata in E Major - Opus 109, No. 30

Duke Ellington - Selections from the Sacred Concerts

- In the Beginning, God

- Heaven/ My Love

- Come Sunday

Olivier Messiaen- Selections from Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jesus

- Le Baiser de L'Enfant Jesus - No. 15

- Regard de l'Eglise d'Amour - No. 20

The Lyric Chamber Music Society of New York presented pianist Kenny Drew, Jr., at the Kosciuszko Foundation in a solo program which was mixed in many ways. Well known in the jazz world, Drew often takes a song out in near-romantic flight, never artificially sweetened, making your head and body sway, and always with a solid underpinning of stride and other jazz foundations. "Jaunty" is a good descriptor. Just a quick look at the headnote will show you a most intelligent mind is behind the programming.

The opening Chopin pieces revealed a musician equally grounded in both classical and jazz music. Each Chopin work was played pretty much straight, then extended outward in improvisatory fashion. In fact, the opening waltz had such idiomatic rhythmic phrasing (and played at the Polish foundation at that!) that it and the following preludes had me dreaming of an entire Kenny Drew program of pure Chopin. The waltz evolved into a swinging thing, interlaced with Chopin filigree. The familiar Prelude in e minor segued into an extended fantasia taking a roundabout course (at one point a near-Latin rhythm was detectable), chord-based, which nevertheless retained the flavor of this prelude throughout, until its safe return "home." The Prelude in F# Major was less fluid and more vertical, rhythm becoming an equal with the melody and embellishment.

Sonata 30 is one of the lesser-known and, for most listeners, deceptively easy of the late sonatas. I expected it to be a natural for this musician, since the first movement has crazy time changes and abrupt shifts from vivace to adagio espressivo, and the final movement's very-varied variations. This being Beethoven's birthday, Drew announced, "This is for Ludwig," then cajoled himself for being on a first-name basis with the master. In I, Drew had the theme chasing its tail, excitingly, as if a Looney Toon. Later, when it slows, he was a little too deliberate. II gave a mad dash, fun to follow, and Drew displayed a natural ease navigating the many shifts of tempo in the third movement

variations.

During a brief intermission, I ran into a wonderful composer, the Swiss-born Daniel Schnyder, who, like Drew, has feet firmly in both jazz and classical worlds. Schnyder has many discs on Enja and Koch/Schwann, and is a member of a classical/jazz trio with Drew and the great bass trombonist David Taylor. Drew has recorded Schnyder's Piano Concerto, soon to be on CD.

The second half of the evening began with pieces drawn from Duke Ellington's Sacred Concerts. The Ellington pieces sometimes took romantic flight, "Heaven" almost Lisztian. Lots of waterfall trills flowed down "My Love," and "Come Sunday" had a near-Messiaenic/impressionistic intro, which led perfectly into the meat of concert: two pieces from Messiaen's *Vingt Régards*, which Drew quipped was "definitely the strangest Christmas music." No. 15, "Le Baiser de l'Enfant Jesus" lacked the hypnotic flow necessary for this transcendental music to take effect. There was a tentativeness, each note seemed too deliberate: his birds did not sing. When the piece concluded, a man seated next to me, asked, guilelessly, "Was this an arranged by Bill Evans?" No. 20, "Regard de l'Eglise d'Amour," suffered from the opposite tack. It was massively percussive, with thunderous clouds, terrific trills, glorious even when inappropriately so. There was no denying it was exciting, though, and at its conclusion the majority of the audience rose to its feet in approbation.

As an encore, Drew started with a vaguely Ravelian sequence which turned into a quote from "Jingle Bells," which made every laugh happily, and then the piece turned into "Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas," with all the virtuosic stops pulled: allusions to Messiaen, skating on ice, and many other styles and rhythms in a delightful display of wit and technique.

One hopes to hear a lot more of Kenny Drew, Jr., and his hybrid works. He has a genuine gift for Chopin. I'm very curious to hear his takes on Schubert, available on a concert recording available directly from Mr. Drew, which I have not heard.

The Lyric continues its programming in 2009 with a series by Felix Mendelssohn and Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel called "Mendelssohn: What's New," including many world premieres. They also offer the "Haydn-Go-Seek" and a Jewish concert music series.

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