

Christopher Taylor

“an insightful program coupled with dazzling technique”



Christopher Taylor probes depths of composers at UAB Piano Series recital

Five Stars out of Five

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Piano aficionados looking for an insightful program coupled with dazzling technique would have rejoiced at the **UAB Piano Series** offering Sunday.

Christopher Taylor could be aggressive, even strident at times with Bach, Brahms, Rzewski and Beethoven. Yet his focus never wavered in delivering the complete picture behind these composers' works. Take, for example, the four J.S. Bach Duets that opened the recital. They proceed upward in pitch (E minor through A minor), as well as catalogue number (BWV 802-805), and Taylor took full advantage of the heightening tension with bold playing and sharp attacks. By the time the fugue in the A minor duet rolled around, Taylor had swept listeners into Bach's world.

The eight pieces -- four capriccios and four intermezzos -- in Brahms' Op. 76 piano pieces are not often performed together, but Taylor found continuity

and contrast, from the turbulence of the Capriccios in F sharp minor (No. 1) and C sharp minor (No. 5) to the lyricism of the Intermezzo in B flat major (No. 4) and transparent textures in the Intermezzo in A major (No. 6). In the C major Capriccio (No. 8), he ramped up the drama to reach an emotional high.

Composed in 1980, Frederic Rzewski's "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues" is one of the most kinetic piano works of the late 20th century. Driven by repeated notes on the low end of the keyboard, it calls for clusters of notes to be played with the forearms and flat of the hand, alternating between white keys and black keys. Above all, it requires a steady rhythm, which allows a quotation from Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 and the original blues melody to clearly emerge. Taylor, a muscular pianist with precise technique, is perfectly suited to this music, not only for his ability to pull off the near-relentless pulse, but for his understanding of blues.

Taylor held together Beethoven's 35-



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minute Diabelli Variations with brief, but appropriate, lulls in the action, allowing its playful tunes, shocking pounces, triggers and flourishes to be set in sharp relief. The three slow variations toward the end (29, 30, 31) became a dirge, the Fuga (32) a masterful triumph, the final variation (33) a happy ending.

For an encore, Taylor further cemented his versatility by playing a transcription of an Art Tatum improv of "Tiger Rag," even inserting Tatum's Debussy-esque diversion.

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