

Daniel Gortler



Pianist Daniel Gortler introduces his latest recording in a recital featuring works by Schumann, Mendelssohn, and Grieg in Review

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On the same night when many music lovers flocked to Carnegie Hall for Daniil Trifonov's latest recital, a smaller but very enthusiastic group filled up (quite literally) the Victor Borge concert hall at the Scandinavia House, for the piano recital of Daniel Gortler. Mr. Gortler, an Israeli-American pianist with an impressive résumé, used this evening as a launching event for his latest recording – a selection of twenty-one *Lyric Pieces* by Edvard Grieg (of which he only performed twelve at this event). Based on what I've heard, I am tempted to purchase the CD and enjoy more of this pianist's refined playing.

As we were informed in the program, the instrument on which Mr. Gortler performed belonged initially to Victor Borge, and is on loan to the Scandinavia House through the generosity of Borge's grandson. Perhaps as a nod to the irreverent former owner, Mr. Gortler appeared wearing zipper-pocket pants and white sneakers that complemented the beautifully curated program by this seasoned musician. The program included Schumann's *Kinderszenen*, followed by selections from Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words* and, as the centerpiece of the evening, Grieg's *Lyric Pieces*. This is what I would call a "Maestro's

program," one which evokes the last recitals of Horowitz and Rubinstein, favoring deceptively "easier" pieces over the big war-horses of the piano repertoire. Of course, such a selection is in fact one of the most demanding an artist can put forward, and requires a tremendous amount of depth and an almost magical ability to enthrall and hypnotize an audience. Daniel Gortler is a great talent and genuine musician of the kind we label as "the real thing."

The Schumann cycle, in a truly outstanding rendition, possesses a delicate wonderment with which a young child looks at the world; somewhat paradoxically, it is usually the older and very wise performers who are able to capture such purity and simplicity. Mr. Gortler has a beautiful and warm tone. The pianist found beautiful colors in *Dreaming* and *Child Falling Asleep*. The last piece, the almost metaphysical *The Poet Speaks*, presented some interesting colors.

With the selection of twelve *Songs Without Words*, Mr. Gortler seemed to warm up, both technically and musically. His wonderful articulation was evident in several of the pieces and it was clear that he connects on an emotional level with these works. In

the *Venetian Gondola Song* he pulled us into a magical world of sound and imagery and Op. 85, No. 3, was imbued with genuine urgency and a winged feeling! In the *Duetto* Op. 38, No. 6, Mr. Gortler found just the right individuality for each partner of the conversation. With the fiery Op. 62, No. 2, the pianist reached a passionate finale which was beautifully voiced and gracefully soaring.

Although Daniel Gortler has recorded all the pieces presented on this program, at some point or another, it was clear that the *Lyric Pieces* by Grieg were the freshest and sharpest in his fingers. I found his interpretations refreshingly spontaneous, unaffected, and beautifully poetic. In *Arietta* we were treated to the touch of a true master, and the famous *March of the Dwarfs* revealed an intoxicating sense of humor

and excellent dramaturgical sense. In the beautiful *Melody* Op. 47, No. 3, the pianist found the simplicity and magic. In *Butterflies* he created a compelling visual, basking in light and shadow. Mr. Gortler was at his very best in *At the Cradle*, where he found a tenderness and warmth that are seldomly heard in live performances; he worked with a wide palette of colors and conjured quite a bit of magic. I was very impressed by his sensitivity to harmonic changes, as displayed in *Solitary Traveller*, and he truly made the *Brooklet* come alive in a vivid tableau. With *Summer's Eve*, Mr. Gortler evoked an almost olfactory experience, reminiscent of some of Debussy's Preludes. *Puck* was suitably playful, and the final piece on the program, *Notturmo* Op. 54, No. 4, was a fitting finale to an evening of sound poetry (the short Schumann encore notwithstanding).