

### Preview

#### CIPC Concert Series: Duo Amal

by Mike Telin



How quickly life can change. Just ask Israeli pianist Yaron Kohlberg, the second prize winner at the 2007 Cleveland International Piano Competition. After joining forces with Palestinian pianist Bishara Haroni for a peace concert at the Oslo Opera House in 2011, the two pianists chose to redirect their professional energies away from solo careers in favor of pursuing their career paths as a duo piano team.

On Saturday, February 22 beginning at 8:00 pm in Reinberger Chamber Music Hall at Severance Hall, the Cleveland International Piano Competition Concert Series presents [Duo Amal](#), Yaron Kohlberg and Bishara Haroni, duo pianos.

The sold-out concert features Schubert's *Fantasy in F Minor*, Shostakovich's *Concertino for Two Pianos*, Rachmaninoff's *Suite No. 1*, an arrangement of Prokofiev's *Symphony No. 1, "Classical"* and Avner Dorman's *Karsilama*. Beginning at 7:00 pm in Reinberger Hall, Yaron Kohlberg and Bishara Haroni will participate in a discussion led by Charles Michener. The discussion is open to anyone holding a ticket to the concert.

Although much has been made of the teaming of an Israeli and a Palestinian, Kohlberg says it really is all about the music and the musical chemistry the two pianists felt in Norway. "The thing for us is first of all musical. The fact that we are Israeli and Palestinian is just a fact," Kohlberg said during a recent telephone conversation. "We are just two people who are musicians and we focus on the music. Obviously when we met in Norway, first of all we felt a very strong musical connection."

Kohlberg recalls he and Haroni's very first Oslo rehearsal, "It was at a friend's place and it was very easy for us to just get things together. We worked on some interpretation details, but technically everything was right there. Everything fell into place. We also reacted very well to each other personally."

Although the two had only a short time to prepare for the concert, Kohlberg thinks it went well. "I wouldn't say it was perfect but it certainly [went better] than what I would have

expected, especially after just two days of rehearsal. But the connection between the two of us was very strong and we both felt that we should try to do more.”

Kohlberg says that soon after the Oslo concert they set their professional sights on becoming Duo Amal. “Of course we have been working as hard as we can to become a good duo,” adding with a laugh, “and I hope we have developed since that first performance.”

Things have been going quite well for Duo Amal. In addition to a busy concert schedule they recently released their first CD. “Yes, it was less than two months ago on the Camarata label. This is our first professionally produced CD. We had a couple CDs we produced ourselves but this is the first label we are working with so it is very exciting for us.”

Kohlberg and Haroni also made the decision to base themselves in Berlin. “We actually lived in the same building for two years. We had our own place to rehearse,” Kohlberg remembers. “We had the bottom floor and while it was not ours, we used it as a rehearsal place. That was very good for us, we were able to practice a lot and spend time together. Now we don’t live in the same building but we are still pretty close so it’s very easy to get together.”

As far as their solo careers go, “to be honest the duo is now our main career path. We put most if not all of our efforts into that. Here and there we do play solos and chamber music with other people, but all in all the duo is our priority. I like playing recitals because it keeps you in shape but career wise it is all about the duo.”

Did Yaron Kohlberg have any difficulty adjusting to his decision? “Well at first, and to be honest, it did take me a while to adjust. I was so focused on my solo career for almost all of my life. I did the competitions and I was playing recitals and with orchestras, everything that solo pianists do. Then starting to think about promoting the duo career was also a process that took me a while. It was about a year to a year and a half until I was fully there for the duo.”

Both Kohlberg and Haroni are having fun exploring the great duo piano literature. “Nowadays we are trying to find a good combination between the classical repertoire, the famous pieces for two pianos and four hands. We have also commissioned a couple of pieces and we are now starting to do our own transcriptions.” We won’t have them for the Cleveland concert, but I hope by the next time we’re there.”

Are there any plans to move into musical styles and genres other than classical? “We’re trying all sorts of musical directions, but we are certainly going to stay in classical music because first of all we are classical pianists. But we are planning to expand our interests a little. I can’t really elaborate right now, but as soon as things are ready you’re going to know and ask about them.” And, he says laughing, “if you don’t ask me, I’m going to call and tell you about it.”

Kohlberg admits to being a big fan of Radio Head, “For me they’re the best music makers in the last fifty years, they’re really amazing. I grew up listening to rock and pop and also jazz. To be honest, in my free time I listen more to rock than to classical music. All my life I’ve listened to classical music, but now rock is there too. Although I still think

that classical music is the best music ever written, it's always nice to open your mind to other types of music too because there are some great things out there."

"It's very important for people to listen to classical music," Kohlberg adds. "But there are many classical musicians who are embracing and playing music that is not totally classical. I think it's a very important process because it could bring people who are a little bit scared of classical music into the concert halls. And that's totally a good thing."

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