

**Kent Keyboard Series:
Logan Skelton in Ludwig Hall (Apr. 22)**

by Daniel Hathaway



The Kent State University Keyboard Series ended its current season on Sunday, April 22 with spectacularly lucid performances of Bartók and Liszt by University of Michigan piano professor Logan Skelton. The former was Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra*, an unlikely subject for a piano arrangement, the latter Liszt's sometimes intractable *Sonata in b*, brilliantly brought to heel on this occasion.

Skelton warmed himself and the audience up for the main events with disarming performances of two little excerpts from Bartók's *For Children, Part One* — “Stars, stars, brightly shine,” and “Swineherd Dance,” miniatures that served to gently focus ears and attention before two lengthy, more demanding pieces.

Producing a small pile of scores, Skelton noted that the great Hungarian pianist György Sándor had edited Bartók's own 1944 arrangement of the *Concerto for Orchestra* in an attempt to make the unplayable playable. Skelton undertook his own arrangement of the concerto to further that process.

It might seem like a fool's errand to take a piece designed to show off the colors and virtuosity of individual sections of the orchestra and arrange it for a single keyboard instrument, but Skelton pulled it off both in his adaptation and his performance. Instrumental hues came across vividly, and the pianist's lively articulation helped complete the tonal picture, especially in the *Giuoco delle coppie* (“Game of Pairs”) movement. Foot tapping and stamping added a bit of percussion.

Skelton caught the humor in the *Intermezzo interrotto* — where the composer's train of thought gets interrupted by the sound of a neighbor's radio — and brought the

five-movement work to a spirited conclusion with a brilliant performance of the perpetual motion finale.

The pianist brought unusual transparency to the Liszt sonata, revealing its structure with such clarity that his performance became its own analysis of the work. Setting a brisk tempo at the beginning, he masterfully connected Liszt's fertile ideas into a coherent narrative. Later on, he gave the voices of the fugue high profile, and made different kinds of satisfying arrivals each time the Sonata's transcendent theme came around. Viewing the piece as a whole rather than as a series of episodes, the pianist cannily ordered its climaxes on a hierarchical scale that left ears fresh.

It's unfortunate that this event took place late in the afternoon of the first really fine Sunday of the spring when — especially on a university campus — souls starved for sunshine and warm breezes are more in the mood for frisbee than piano recitals. Smallish but enthusiastic on Sunday, the audience in Ludwig Recital Hall was in the mood for an encore, and Logan Skelton supplied a lovely palate-cleanser: George Shearing's arrangement of *Over the Rainbow*.

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