

## Preview

### **Pianist/Improviser Gabriela Montero to appear on Mixon Masters Series at CIM on January 23**

by Daniel Hathaway



Give a baby a toy piano and she'll almost inevitably attack its keyboard with a fist. Not Gabriela Montero. When the Venezuelan-born pianist was seven months old, she used her fingers to caress the keys of the gift her grandmother had just given her.

That auspicious beginning led to piano lessons and, when she was eight, her concerto debut with José Antonio Abreu's original National Youth Orchestra of Venezuela, when she played Haydn's D Major Concerto.

Montero will visit Cleveland to perform on the Mixon Hall Masters Series at the Cleveland Institute of Music on Thursday, January 23 at 8:00 pm, when she will play Brahms's *Three Intermezzos, op. 117*, Schumann's *Fantasy in C, op. 17*, and a series of classical improvisations on themes suggested by the audience. The concert is part of this season's "Return of the Composer Virtuoso" series.

A talent for improvisation was among Montero's earliest self discoveries. The pianist, who was not available for an interview, has written, "I have been improvising since my hands first touched the keyboard, but for many years I kept this aspect of my playing secret. Then Martha Argerich overheard me improvising one day and was ecstatic. In fact, it was Martha who persuaded me that it was possible to combine my career as a serious 'classical' artist with the side of me that is rather unique."

Montero's improvisations have been the subject of two celebrated CDs, *Bach and Beyond* and *Baroque*, the latter having been nominated for a Grammy Award in 2009. Last week, the pianist improvised a score for Friedrich Wilhelm Murnaus's silent film, *Nosferatu*, at Berlin's Komische Oper, using themes by Prokofiev as a point of departure. Earlier, Montero played Mozart's 21st piano concerto with the SWR Orchestra and audience-suggested improvisations for the New Year's Gala at the Festspielhaus in Baden-Baden.

Gabriela Montero received national and international attention as the pianist at President Barack Obama's first inauguration ceremony, when she played with cellist Yo-Yo Ma, violinist Itzhak Perlman and clarinetist Anthony McGill. It was later revealed that the quar-

tet had decided to finger-sync to a recording due to the freezing weather on the steps of the Capitol. "It was wicked cold," Ma noted in a follow-up story on NPR.

In addition to her formal recital, Montero will offer a free, public master class on Wednesday, January 22 at 5:30 pm in Mixon Hall.

The "Return of the Composer Virtuoso" series concludes on February 21 with a concert by composer, singer and performer Meredith Monk.

For tickets, call the CIM box office at 216.795.3211.

*Published on clevelandclassical.com January 21, 2014*