

**Tri-C Classical Piano Series:  
Roberto Plano (Oct. 15) &  
Awadagin Pratt (Nov. 12) at CMA**

by Daniel Hathaway



Italian pianist Roberto Plano, who won the Cleveland International Piano Competition in 2001, returned to open the Tri-C Classical Piano Series in Gartner Auditorium at the Cleveland Museum of Art on Sunday afternoon, October 15. His arresting program of music by Liszt, Piazzolla, Villa-Lobos, and Ginastera culminated in the premiere of his own solo arrangement of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*.

A hearty dose of Liszt occupied the first half: four movements from *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* ranged from the gentle “Awaking Child’s Hymn” to the almost comically bombastic “Funérailles,” with the brutal “Invocation” and highly decorated “Hymn of Love” in between. Plano’s playing was fluent and commanding.

Moving south of the Equator after intermission, Plano turned to music by Piazzolla, Villa-Lobos, and Ginastera. Villa-Lobos’ flashy “Impressões seresteiras” from *Ciclo brasileiro* led on to Ginastera’s bittersweet *Milonga*, Op. 2, and his five-movement *Suite de danzas criollas*. By turns gentle and playful, dissonant and rhythmic, ruminating and calm, the suite of traditional Argentine dances gave Plano the opportunity to change up his playing style, ending with an exciting scherzando.

Plano’s performance of the Gershwin *Rhapsody* left conflicting impressions. He tore through the piece, pacing it oddly and passing over some of its impish moments. He sometimes overplayed, making the Steinway’s hammers ring, and in the

recapitulation tended to make added filigree more prominent than the music it was decorating. Some of Gershwin's own details got buried.



The second concert in the Tri-C Series brought Cincinnati-based pianist Awadagin Pratt to Gartner Auditorium on November 12, Yamaha piano in tow. Series artistic director Emanuela Friscioni thanked Steinway, one of its sponsors, for permitting the use of a rival brand!

Striking in his dreadlocks and untucked shirt, Pratt began his recital with Brahms' rarely performed *Ballades*, Op.

10. There are four of them, the first based on a Scottish ballad, *Edward*, but because they're sectionalized and are arranged in minor/major key pairs, it was difficult to tell exactly where you were. The pieces vacillate between drama, sweetness, and restlessness, and Pratt brought out their inner characters vividly.

Pratt followed the Brahms with an insightful performance of Beethoven's decidedly odd *Sonata in D*, Op. 10, No. 3, beginning with a blaze of octaves. He moved the brooding Largo right along, put across the charm of the Menuetto, and made good sense out of the composer's curious question and answer gestures in the finale, which was festooned with brilliant runs. More pianists should take this piece on: there are a lot of quirks to iron out, and Pratt was on top of them.

The pianist fiddled with his printed program after intermission, substituting two Busoni arrangements of Bach Chorale Preludes for the announced Rachmaninoff pieces. *Wachet auf* received just a bit of a swing in its countermelody, and Pratt brought out the tenor-voice chorale tune clearly — a bit of a feat on the piano. *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* was elegant in its sinuous coloratura line and beautifully paced.

Two works that share similar formats closed the program. Lera Auerbach's *Chorale, fugue and postlude*, a dark, dissonant, ferocious piece, was followed by César Franck's *Prelude, chorale, and fugue*, a virtuosic, cyclic work with some dissonance of its own variety. Pratt played both of them with passion and flair, keeping the dissimilar lines of each fugue clear and easy to follow.

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com November 28, 2017.*

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