

**CIPC Concert Series:
15 minutes with Shai Wosner**

by Daniel Hathaway



The final event in the Cleveland International Piano Competition's 2019 Concert Series will feature the duo-piano team of Orion Weiss and Shai Wosner in music by Schubert, Brahms, and David Lang on Saturday, September 14 at 8:00 pm in Reinberger Chamber Hall at Severance Hall.

The recital reunites two longtime friends and colleagues and introduces the Israeli-born Wosner to Cleveland (Weiss, born in Gates Mills, is well-known in these parts). I caught up with Shai Wosner by telephone earlier this month and began by asking whether he and Weiss have played this particular program before.

Shai Wosner: We performed it at the Kennedy Center earlier this year, and will play it in New Mexico next month. We're having a great time with it.

Daniel Hathaway: You and Orion have a long history of performing together.

SW: We go back nearly twenty years. For a long time we were each doing our own thing, but a few years ago we thought it was time to play together again. We had this unusual idea for a program with two huge pieces.

DH: One of those is Schubert's Sonata in C, nicknamed the "Grand Duo." You've been heralded in the press as a Schubert specialist.

SW: Schubert is really an entire world unto himself. What I find most compelling about him is that everything seems to be intertwined. When he writes music that's naive on the surface, it always seems to have a dark undertow. And yet when his music is extremely painful — sometimes almost violent in its impulses — he almost always finds some kind of consolation afterwards. There's a feeling of reconciliation and sometimes resignation, but the dark and the bright are always mixed in a fascinating way in Schubert. I feel that's something irresistible that I need in my life all the time.

DH: And the Brahms f-minor Sonata has an interesting backstory.

SW: It's essentially a version of what most people know as his piano quintet. He wrote the two at the same time. He wasn't sure about publishing the two-piano version until later when he thought it would be fun to play it that way, and he was right. Two pianos is a very special beast as an ensemble. It's a big sound, and you feel like you're really empowering each other in ways that are only possible in this combination. It's a great piece, but it's a special treat to play it with a very close friend. Orion and I nearly always see the music eye-to-eye.

DH: You're pairing these two big works with little pieces by David Lang.

SW: Lang's two short pieces are very humble in their ambitions. *Gravity* is all about falling gestures. It sounds a bit like music from outer space. We're playing it as a prelude to the Schubert which begins with a similar falling gesture, but I don't think Schubert and Lang consulted each other. The second Lang piece, *After Gravity*, is trying to achieve the opposite — weightlessness in music. It has no melodic content, and no rhythm, only a texture that seems to float in the air. It comes and goes without ever touching the ground. We're playing it on two pianos as a prelude to the Brahms.

DH: How will you set up the pianos for the Brahms?

SW: We'll be facing each other. It's obviously more difficult for coordination, but at the same time we try to blend the sound of the two instruments, and when you face each other and take the lid off the front piano, all the sounds can mix together. You just have to trust each other a lot.

DH: Are you enjoying reigniting your partnership with Orion Weiss?

SW: It's really fun to spend time on the road with a close friend playing this literature. Some of the four-hand and two-piano repertoire is quite neglected. There

are incredible gems that you never hear in the concert hall, and actually the Schubert — a huge masterpiece that's almost like a symphony — is not played that often.

DH: What other infrequently-performed works are on your bucket list?

SW: A lot of other Schubert four-hand works, especially variations. And there's the Mozart F-major Sonata, which is also huge. It's as important as any other Mozart work, but somehow you never encounter it. There's really quite a lot of neglected repertoire out there.

Tickets for the Orion Weiss and Shai Wosner four-hand and duo-piano concert are available [online](#) and student tickets will be available at the door for \$5.

CIPC President Yaron Kohlberg will host an onstage discussion with Weiss and Wosner from 7:15 to 7:40 pm before the performance.

The two pianists will also conduct a master class with four local students in Glick Recital Hall at The Music Settlement on Friday from 3:00-5:00 pm. The event is free and open to the public.

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