

Music From The Western Reserve: Pianist Yaron Kohlberg at Steinway Gallery

by Daniel Hathaway



Many pianists win prizes in international piano competitions but few return to the scenes of their triumphs to run them.

Make an exception for Yaron Kohlberg, the Israeli keyboardist who came in second in the 2007 Cleveland International Piano Competition at the age of 24, and became President of Piano Cleveland in 2018, just in time to have to cancel the 2020 competition due to the pandemic. (As a placeholder,

he invented Virtu(al)oso, an online competition that increased the organization's global audience.)

On Sunday, June 6, Cleveland piano fans got an opportunity to hear Kohlberg himself in a short solo recital that formed the *coda* to Music From The Western Reserve's online concert series. Pre-recorded at the Steinway Piano Gallery, the performance showcased Kohlberg's formidable talent — as well as his grace under pressure — in Beethoven's Op. 111 Sonata, a Schubert Impromptu, and three Chopin Waltzes. Two encores were delightful *Schlagobers*.

Any student brave enough to take on Beethoven's last piano sonata could learn much from Yaron Kohlberg. His technique smoothed over its numerous challenges and allowed the listener to sit back and let the music speak for itself rather than worrying about when the next glitch might occur. His playing was altogether wholesome and healthy, and that's all too rare among interpreters of late Beethoven. His consistency in performing the composer's repetitive dotted rhythms was particularly impressive.

Schubert's *Impromptu No. 2 in B-flat* showed Kohlberg's talent for lyricism, and the Chopin Waltzes inspired some ravishing digital filigree. The third, the "Minute" Waltz, came in at a minute and a half, but was delightfully caffeinated.

Yaron Kohlberg made good on his promise of a couple of surprises at the end. The first was a bright reading of the Gavotte from J.S. Bach's *French Suite No. 5*, a request from arts advocate Bill Blair. The second was Mozart's *Turkish March* with additions that anticipate this summer's new competition requirement for a "virtuosic popular music transcription."

Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 22, 2021.

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