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Pianist Albright displays virtuosity

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ALBANY -- Pianist **Charlie Albright** galvanized a capacity crowd Friday night at the Massry Center for the Arts not only with a superb technical display but also a level of musicianship that could only be called poetically magical. To some extent this isn't surprising. A winner of numerous competitions, **Albright** was recently named the 2012 Gilmore Artist, as well as Harvard University's Leverett Artist-in-Residence -- a position held in 1979 by legendary cellist Yo-Yo Ma. That's pretty amazing considering that at age 23, **Albright** is still working on his master's degree at New England Conservatory of Music in Boston.

His program showed off some of the things he does best: a frothy, fleet, effortless technique; a singing tone that is like a caress; phrasing that breathes and lifts with exquisite nuances; and an exuberance that is as sunny as it is intense, passionate and effervescent.

He began with two Impromptus by Schubert -- No. 2 in E-flat Major and No. 3 in G-flat Major. The first was magical in its expressiveness, while the second showed off his technical control with its streams of notes.

Adolf Schulz-Evler's extravagant arrangement of Strauss' "Beautiful Blue Danube" might have been over the top for another pianist, but **Albright** stepped back and allowed the waltz to seduce with charm. He used a light touch that was not too loud and insinuated pauses as he began phrases that built to grand dramatic climaxes. **Albright** showed he could do anything, at least technically. He's also a bit of the communicator and talked to the crowd about each piece.

While these works were exceptional, his interpretation of Beethoven's Sonata No. 31, Op. 110 was the work of a 21st century pianist who had left traditional ideas behind. His was not the stuff of taut rhythms, technical clarity, dry tone and an inner intensity that compelled. Rather, **Albright** turned this sonata into a romantic excursion of introspection with numerous pauses, a blurred tone and colors that would have suited Debussy perfectly. It wasn't Beethoven, but it was a statement.

Albright's 12 Chopin Etudes from Op. 25 were, however, perfect. Everything was well sung with traditional rubato, tempos and exceptional pacing. His technical display was nothing short of sensational.

The audience whistled and clapped and received two encores: Volodos' arrangement of Mozart's Turkish March, which was an another incredible display of showstopping technique, and **Albright's** own improvisation of the famed "Nessun dorma" aria blended with Maricone's Theme from "The Mission."

The audience couldn't get enough. Masses lined up to buy his compact discs, which **Albright** gladly signed.

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