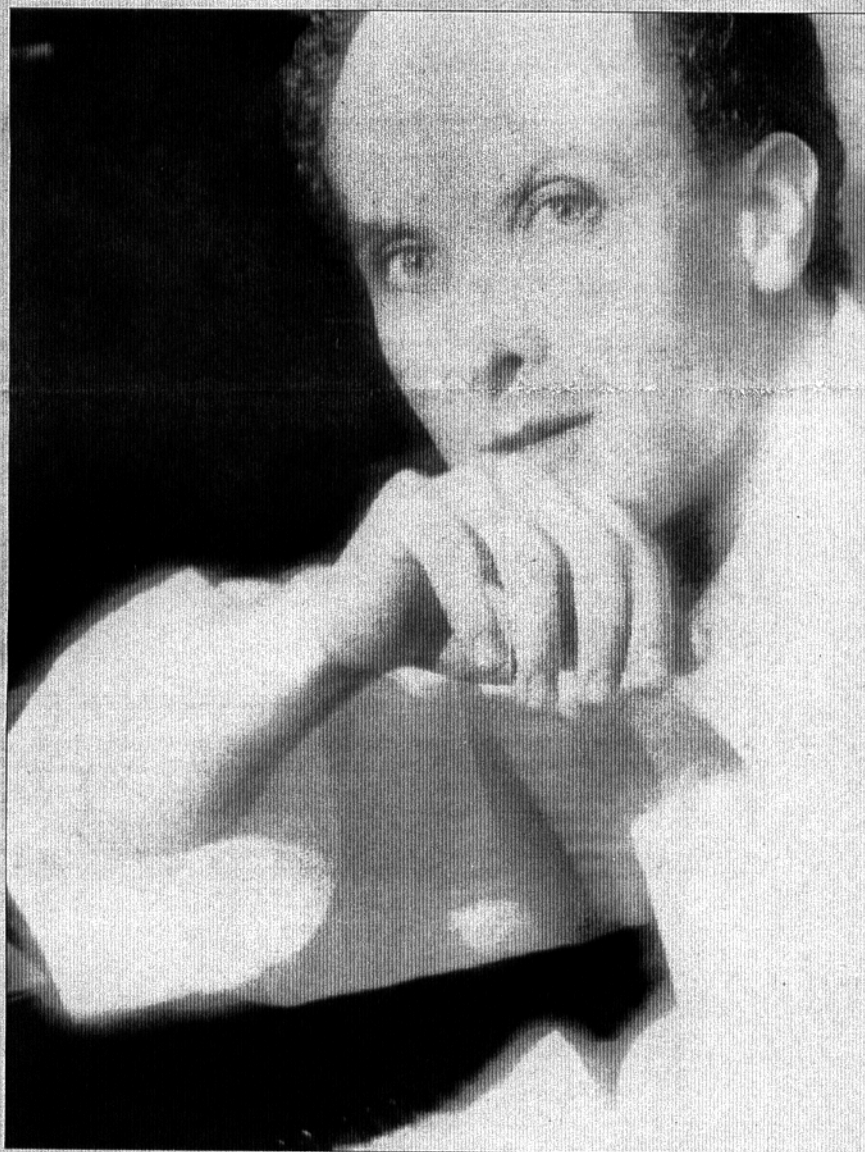


Music

PETER MARSHALL

Gampel, A Master



The last of this fall's Bard College mini-feast of performances brought back pianist Alan Gampel to the Olin Auditorium at Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., last Wednesday evening.

This concert was part of a world recital tour by Mr. Gampel, consisting of 20 concerts marking the 150th anniversary of the death of Frederic Chopin (1810-1849). The tour began Oct. 2 in St. Cloud, Minn., and will conclude in Los Angeles Dec. 12 with stops including Paris, Jerusalem and Alice Tully Hall in New York.

An all-Chopin recital, even today, is still somewhat unusual. However, the way Gampel structured this program, it actually made a lot of sense. He began with the Mazurka in A minor, Op. 17, No. 4, which was composed when Chopin was just 14, and concluded with another mazurka, this one in F minor, which was written on his death bed in 1849 and which he never heard performed.

Gampel is a very sensitive pianist who proved to be totally familiar with the virtuosic and poetic, and often quite difficult, construction of Chopin's music. He comes from a musical family and is the grandson of harpsichordist Wanda Landowska. He made his pianistic debut at the Hollywood Bowl at age 7 and was honored with the presidential scholar's award at the White House when he was just 16.

He also received many other prestigious awards and has appeared as soloist with a number of the world's great orchestras, including the Royal Philharmonic of London and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. To be sure, there have been many outstanding exponents of Chopin's music. However, what Gampel brought to this recital was a concentrated eloquence and pianistic mastery which left many a listener spellbound.

Chopin composed his four-part "Fantasia on Polish Airs," Op. 13, in 1828 while still living with his parents in Warsaw. Gampel pointed out that this music is infrequently performed because it was scored for piano solo and a somewhat meaningless orchestral accompaniment which most conductors frown upon. He proved that this music stands on its own just as a piano piece and is quite substantial. Its very complex fourth part was performed with great intensity and tested the enormous technical resources at Gampel's command.

He continued chronologically with two etudes (the "Black Key," No. 5, and the "Revolutionary," No. 12,) and the Waltz in E-flat major which was composed as a "goodbye" to his former girlfriend, Maria, and the Scherzo No. 2 in B-flat minor, Op. 31.

Chopin's poor health, his love affair with George Sand, his move to the island of Majorca with her, his return to Paris and a trip to England thereafter, all were touched upon by Gampel before returning to the keyboard, illustrating the effect Chopin's life had on his music.

The second part of this recital included the Sonata No. 3 in B minor, Op. 58, composed in 1844. Written in four movements, it is one of Chopin's major works. He was very sick, suffering from tuberculosis when he com-

posed it; yet it is to this day a major challenge for anyone who attempts to perform it. Just to watch Gampel's fingers glide with an air of fluency at the keyboard, in particular during the Presto Finale, was an event by itself. This was a display of artistry which very few other pianists could equal.

Let us not overlook that this concert, like the other two of this mini-feast, was free of charge to the public at large, thanks to the generosity of the Leon Levy Foundation at Bard College. Bravo!