



NATIONAL PHILHARMONIC

Going Chopin

Brian Ganz
on showcasing the
composer's oeuvre

By Virginia M. Myers

his career has spanned decades, with prestigious teaching appointments and prize-winning performances, but the internationally recognized pianist is still awed by the composers and the music he plays.

With his reputation for precision and passion, it is his humility that has built Brian Ganz a following. A musician who delights in both performance and teaching, he often talks to his audience, and has been known to take questions during some of his recitals.

"I think it's possible for there to be this sort of barrier between the 'artiste' and the listener, and I try to melt that barrier," says Ganz. Audiences "can sense that I'm not there to wow them. I'm there to commune together at the altar of this great art."

Sitting in the light-filled music room of his Annapolis home, Ganz is open and accessible, shifting the conversation with ease from Chopin's mazurkas to his teenage son's compositions on GarageBand. Silver-haired at 50, his youthful face is unlined; despite a demanding schedule he is unhurried and engaged.

Ganz divides his time between performing, teaching at St. Mary's College of Maryland, where he is Artist-in-Residence, and practicing 10 to 15 hours a week. He is also on the piano faculty at Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore. A regular guest of the National Philharmonic for the past 20 years, he will perform on two dates this season, an all-Chopin recital on January 22 and the Grieg piano concerto on March 12. He is an involved parent, meditates daily and reads spiritual texts like those of the German-born writer Eckhart Tolle, as well as *A Course in Miracles*, a self-study guide published by the Foundation for Inner Peace.

Ganz describes music as an experience that touches him so deeply he feels wounded by its beauty.

"Brian is an extraordinary soul," says longtime friend and colleague Jody Gatwood, concertmaster emeritus of the National Philharmonic. "His music is just really from the heart." Gatwood, like many Philharmonic musicians, always looks forward to Ganz's engagements.

Ganz "has exquisite technique and he takes joy in every music-making experience," says National Philharmonic Music Director and Conductor Piotr Gajewski.

"He's quite something, very special," says Chris Gekker, principal trumpet and another Philharmonic colleague. "When Brian plays lyrically, [the piano] really sounds like a human voice," he says.

Ganz remembers when he was young, "sitting in awe underneath my grandfather's beautiful grand piano and thinking, 'Boy, I would love to do that myself some day.'" Growing up in Kensington and Columbia, MD, he studied under Claire Deene, Ylva Novik and Leon Fleisher, eventually attending Peabody Conservatory. He won prizes at the Queen Elisabeth of Belgium and the Marguerite Long Jacques Thibaud (Paris) International Piano Competitions, and was a fellow at Tanglewood. He has played at the Kennedy Center, La Salle Pleyel and Salle Gaveau in Paris, La Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels and Suntory Hall in Tokyo.

Strathmore is one of his favorite venues, and it is where he will launch a career-defining series of performances in January. Ganz is setting out to play the complete works of Chopin.

Gajewski came up with the idea as a way to celebrate the 200th birthday of his fellow Pole. Performing the life

National Philharmonic
presents
Brian Ganz
Chopin Piano Recital
Saturday, January 22, 8 p.m.

Pianist Brian Ganz begins his quest to play every note Chopin wrote for piano. His solo recital at the Music Center at Strathmore includes:

- Waltz in E-flat, Op. 18
- Sonata No. 2, Op. 35, "Funeral March"
- Scherzo No. 2, Op. 31
- Rondo in C minor, Op. 1
- Early Polonaises, Waltz, Mazurka
- Mazurka in A minor
- 2 Nocturnes, Op. 55
- Polonaise in A-flat, "Heroic," Op. 53

work of any composer is "transcending," says Gajewski. "You get to become friends with someone who lived in another time. You get to know them completely."

Ganz, whose affinity for Chopin is well-known, was a natural partner in the project. "I think Chopin is his muse," says Gatwood.

Ganz expects to perform about 250 individual works in 15 recitals over a decade. The first recital, a solo piano performance, mixes Chopin's earliest works with more mature pieces for what Ganz calls, "a bit of musical gardening, because the early works demonstrate the seed of his genius, and the more mature works the full flowering of that genius."

"Chopin's music has always felt to me like the language of my heart and soul," Ganz says. "It's so gut-bustingly beautiful. You can try to put it in theoretical terms, why this chord is exotic, why that is unexpected, but there's something irreducibly mysterious about it for me." ♪