

## NEWPORT MUSIC FESTIVAL

# Pianist Moyer charms with family tales, music timeline

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Pianist Frederick Moyer is all about the music. But Sunday night at the Newport Music Festival, he wove stories about his talented grandfather in with music from a century ago, making for an informal and engaging evening.

Moyer, who is also a member of the Jazz Arts Trio, told an audience at The Breakers that he hoped to paint a picture of the music scene in the first decade or so of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. That's when his grandfather, David Moyer, began touring as a pianist at the age of 8 and played for Teddy Roosevelt in the White House at 9.

Two years later, his grandfather performed the encore for a recital by the famed English-German pianist Eugene d'Albert. The encore turned out to be Mendelssohn's bubbly "Spinning Song," with which Moyer opened his program.

Then it was on to pieces by Alberto Jonas, Dohnanyi and Busoni, all teachers of his grandfather, who moved to Berlin when he was 11 and played piano duets with the kaiser.

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The Dohnanyi Capriccio in B Minor was perhaps the most interesting offering on the first half of the program, with outer sections that contained all the bombast of Liszt and inner interludes that sounded for all the world like Brahms.

Moyer's thesis for the evening was that music went through a lot of changes around the time of World War I. It was the end of Romanticism and the beginning of all sorts of movements that changed the face of Western classical music, things like atonality and serialism.

To illustrate, Moyer sat down to Debussy's popular "Sunken Cathedral," with its unresolved seventh chords and modal harmonies. Then there was a polytonal piece by Bela Bartok, "A Bit Topsy," in which the right and left hands are in different keys.

Among the gems on the program were Arnold Schoenberg's atonal "Six Little Pieces," which Moyer said are quite ravishing, if you dropped all expectations.

As a salute to dying Romanticism, Moyer tackled four Rachmaninoff Preludes, including the glowing D Major from Op. 23, and the brooding B Minor from Op. 32.

To finish off the evening, there was a driving rendition of the early Toccata by Sergei Prokofiev that seems like a sketch for the toccata that ends the Seventh Piano Sonata.

For the sole encore, Moyer slipped into a jazzy arrangement of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "It Might As Well Be Spring" from "State Fair." It turns out his maternal grandfather, Paul Green, was a playwright who wrote the screenplay for the film.

As for Moyer's other grandfather, he left Berlin at the start of World War I to avoid being drafted into the German Army. He ended up joining the U.S. Army and returning to Germany, where he took care of pigeons used to send messages.

After the war, he joined the faculty of Bucknell University and later Oberlin College, where he taught for 35 years, never regretting not having a concert career in the States.



FREDERICK MOYER

PIANIST

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