

The Oregonian

## Angela Hewitt plays with grace, passion, precision

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Angela Hewitt, Canada's gift to the piano, performed in Portland on Sunday. Her program of Bach, Beethoven, Rameau and Chabrier was similar to her New York concert last week, and as many of us expected, she played beautifully. Here's my review.

Behind Angela Hewitt's balletic posture, the long, supple arms, the straight back and concentrated elegance, lies a pianist of passion and doggedness. Unlike almost any other pianist today, Hewitt offers studied grace alongside untiring exuberance. The superb Canadian pianist revealed both qualities Sunday at a sellout recital in the Newmark Theatre.

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Hewitt's Bach (French Suite No. 4 in E-Flat Major) was tempered, unified and fresh. Unlike the harpsichord, for which Bach wrote this music, the piano allows for swelling and diminishing of sound, but Hewitt didn't amplify effects just because she could.

Her tone was uncluttered, clear as glass. All was concentrated calmness, discreet intelligence and a tone so captivating, she had no need to sentimentally drag tempos in order to be intimate or expressive.

All of this I expect from Hewitt, a frequent performer on Portland Piano International's series. I trust her Bach, knowing that it comes from profound explorations of his music. In 2005, she finished an 11-year project to record all of Bach's major keyboard works. To hear how Bach can be played today, how the state of interpretation stands, Hewitt provides an answer.

Her Beethoven (C Major Sonata, Op. 2, No. 3) grew bolder, requiring her to dance along the keyboard with comic outbursts, darting jabs and abrupt silences. She took a dangerously fast tempo in the first movement, but her clear touch didn't fail her. A quick memory catch at the end avoided disaster.

The second movement brooded mournfully, a lonely dream that sang to itself with a sadness far removed from the three other upbeat movements. Hewitt's musicality stood above the musically neutral offerings of others.

A second Baroque suite of dance movements might have lulled our ears to sleep, but Rameau's Suite in A Minor was so unlike the opening Bach that only the names of the movements ("Allemande," "Courante," etc.) seemed similar.

Hewitt's independence of hands was astonishing. She pursued harmonic shading, rhythmic aggressiveness and melodic shapes with freedom and agility in each hand. At times, Rameau's frequent ornaments, still clear on Hewitt's Fazioli piano, seemed to be carrying on private conversations with one another. Apart from the wizardry, the distilled music gained dimension and meaning.

I was underwhelmed to see Emmanuel Chabrier (1841-94) on the program. Like Margot Fonteyn dancing a foxtrot, who wanted to hear Hewitt play French salon music? But she won me over with her unflagging ease in the devilishly difficult "Pieces pittoresque" and "Bourree fantasque."

Grace under pressure only begins to describe her.