

Leslie Howard concert proves a musical wonder

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by: [Eliana Sanchez](#) on November 21, 2012



Leslie Howard's pianoforte recital Nov. 14 was the best piano performance I've seen in Salt Lake City since his concert at the U four years ago.

For two full hours Howard played pieces by three of his favorite, notoriously complex composers.

Even with 15 years of piano experience under my belt, I wouldn't touch Howard's selections from Franz Liszt — interpretations of Wagner, Verdi, Gounod and Mozart operas. The pieces by Ludwig van Beethoven and Sergei Rachmaninoff — Eroica and Sonata No. 1 in D minor, respectively — would take me years of practice to merely master the correct notes, a project in itself.

Howard not only played the interpretations nearly flawlessly, but with both grace and passion heard in each note.

Even for the two men sitting next to me who had only a shallow understanding of classic piano, it was a brilliant performance. Howard's obvious skill made the complex music accessible even to the untrained ear.

The second half of the performance was dedicated to 45 minutes of uninterrupted technical Liszt selections. Liszt is known for his interpretations and transcriptions of external themes, so each of Howard's four selections were familiar.

Howard flaunted his technique by allowing the audience to temporarily forget how challenging his selections were. Not once did I think about how quickly his fingers were moving, nor did I question how he was able to jump from a barely audible pianissimo to a forceful and powerful fortissimo.

It was not until he paused between pieces and the audience uniformly let out the breath they'd been holding that I was able to grasp the intricacy of what I'd just witnessed.

Howard began his musical studies before he was able to read as a child prodigy. He is known for his perfect pitch and ability to play by ear. Prodigy or not, Howard's performance of Liszt is the result of a lifetime of work. He is famed for his recordings of the complete works — more than 300 pieces — of Liszt.

Known as the authority on Liszt, Howard holds the record for the longest recording project by a solo musician. With more than 95 CDs of solo performance, his command of Liszt's pieces was no surprise, but nonetheless magnificent.

With illusive ease, Howard was able to transform Liszt's chains of ornate trills into smooth, flowing music.



Leslie Howard

The beauty of the performance was made all the more special by the venue itself. Modern lighting, traditional wooden pews and an extravagant organ balcony served to enhance the modern performance of the classic variations, sonatas and operas.

If Howard comes around again, I can guarantee his pianoforte recital is not a show you'll be tempted to sleep through. You won't need a trained ear to appreciate Howard's undeniable and unique musical talent, and you won't witness a better performance until the next Beethoven is born.

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