



Oh so Goode! And even better with music!

Written by Ilona Oltuski | January 26, 2012

Everything about pianist Richard Goode exudes friendliness, courtesy, good humor and patience, yet there is also a curiosity in his vivid eyes, shining out a vitality and youthfulness, belying his age — he turned 68 this past summer.

I have had the opportunity to hear him perform on numerous occasions, not only at one of his frequent concerts at Carnegie Hall, where he is featured as one of the handful of seasoned performers at Carnegie's annual 'keyboard virtuoso' series, but also in more intimate settings, like the 92nd Street Y. **He has always convinced and enthused audiences with his insightful interpretations.** The Financial Times called his recording of all five Beethoven concertos performed with the Budapest Festival Orchestra under Ivàn Fisher (released by Nonesuch Records in 2009) a "landmark recording of the Beethoven concertos." **He is a performer who manages to integrate a personal style and special nuance into even the most renowned repertoire.**

When I entered his Upper East Side apartment, I was asked to please take off my shoes and being greeted by his wife, violinist Marcia Weinfeld, and the venerable pianist himself, who has helped to shape New York's pianistic scene at its best. "My wife teaches her students in the other wing of the apartment," he says, as he closes the large, heavy doors to his studio, furnished with well stocked bookshelves that house part of the famously huge Goode book collection, recordings and lots of music scores, a cozy couch and of course his grand piano.

Like many Bronx natives of his time, Goode comes from a Jewish, Eastern European family — both grandmothers emigrated with their children from the Ukraine to America right before the war and it was many years before their husbands would be able to follow their families to New York. Goode's maternal grandmother was Orthodox and quite observant, prompting his mother to rebel and adopt a rather secular, American way of life. Goode describes his father as very musical, even though he was never musically trained. Once their talented son started serious piano studies, Goode's father took up piano tuning, "which is really difficult, I tried it and could not do it," he adds smiling.

Goode's first teacher, whose house calls he still remembers, did not meet his father's expectations. A more suitable pianistic influence, Elvira Szigety, an aunt of the celebrated violinist Josef Szigety continued guiding the six and a half years old boy for the next three years.

Rosalie Leventritt, famous patron of the arts, became most influential in Richard Goode's early career. The Leventritt Foundation was instrumental in supporting music education all over the country and has been blessed with supporting some of the finest artists. (see the history of Young Audiences at <http://www.youngaudiences.org>) Through Leventritt, Goode was introduced to pianist Rudolf Serkin who, on the board of Young Audiences with Leventritt, was willing to listen to the young talented boy play for him at Leventritt's home.

"Serkin brought me to Claude Frank," says Goode, "who was a student of Schnabel. I had lessons at Leventritt's house. Then I began to attend Mannes College, which, at the time was located on the East Side. I was very lucky to have many positive musical influences in my life through my various teachers, such as my theory teacher Carl Schechter at Mannes, and Nadja Reisenberg, who had been Hoffman's assistant, and later when I went to Curtis, Mieczyslaw Horszowski and of course Serkin, himself. Inevitably your teachers mark you strongly and then you want to get away from them," Goode muses. Bigger than life remains Rudolf Serkin, with "his intense and dramatic way of playing, his totally giving himself to the composer's intentions and his particular style... he was a very powerful personality that I admired and at the same time needed to differentiate myself from. I am a very different person." The other huge artistic influence on Goode – even though transmitted via his recordings, he never met him in person, was Schnabel himself. "If Serkin was the heat, Schnabel was the light", he says. The Austrian pianist Artur Schnabel was legendary for his intellectual command of Beethoven's and Schubert's music, and for his avoidance of any flashy showing off, of a personal bravura technique.

"It was an illumination for me to follow how he looked at music and how he derived intellectually his musical choices with the utmost clarity. Years after I stopped studying at Curtis, Schnabel's son Karl Ulrich gave master classes at Mannes." Goode was in awe of having had such close encounters with his idol's son. "And what a funny and delightful person and such a thorough teacher, he was. His lessons went on for hours and he gave everything in such a warm and generous way. He was exhausted afterwards." he remembers. "I still have scores marked by him."

Goode, together with pianist Mitsuko Uchida, (András Schiff originally participated for a short, initial period as well) took over Rudolf Serkin's historic, forty years long artistic direction of the Marlboro Festival after Serkin's death in 1991. Goode started attending Marlboro, idyllically located in Vermont's countryside –one of the principal breeding places for the next generation of great musicians of the East Coast — at age 14. During nine consecutive summers he played chamber music, learning from coaches, known to be among the best.

I asked him if life has changed in Marlboro under his leadership. He answered somewhat hesitantly: "The tone may have changed a bit, but the basic idea remarkably remained the same. We get the talent; provide a place to work and of course some good guidance, and the spirit of it all creates a fun atmosphere. We set up a structure of discipline and freedom and then we let things happen. A major departure from the old ways is a more harmonious, more accepting attitude towards the musicians, which does not make one feel as if on probation. People used to be much more afraid to be judged – now there is much more freedom. We have generally many string players, but are unfortunately somewhat restricted with pianists. We have auditions and 4-5 of the older ones return generally for three years. That leaves only room for about 5-6 new comers. All in all there are 10 pianists present each summer. All participants rehearse extensively and, if all goes

well, you end up with many performances.” But perhaps one of the most important factors for all the busy musicians at Marlboro is the remarkably simplistic, yet utterly refreshing and kind of missing in today’s pace factor: “It’s a place where you have time!”

On top of it, Marlboro not only offers a very welcome learning experience but also a fun time socially with other young musicians; it is also a really great opportunity to make a mark as an aspiring performer. Many pianists have made a name for themselves as Musicians from Marlboro, with a multitude of performance opportunities beyond the festival.... Some of the widely admired attendees of the festival are the young Marlboro participants Jeremy Denk and Jonathan Biss, a friend of Denk’s, who gave an outstanding duo recital together with Richard Goode at the 92nd Y in February of 2010. Goode met Biss in Marlboro, as he sat in a rehearsal.



Goode/Biss at the 92nd Street y - Photo:Matthew Murphy for NYTimes

About the seemingly increasing amount of vast musical talent all around the world, Goode has the following to say:”The perpetual ability for music has changed; it is remarkable what kind of a difference the Internet has brought about. I myself am still behind in the process,’ he admits smiling. “I have noticed such sophistication at Marlboro, over the past ten years. People are building on what they are exposed to, what they hear and develop a greater ability and affinity. Good technical command has always been widespread. Technical challenges will always somehow be made to overcome. Having a big goal set is exciting and challenges are accepted by musicians. But the level of musicianship has definitely grown. I see that music making in the classical style is much harder for the young generation to master, than perhaps a work of the late 19th or early 20th century. Basic elements are more exposed – every note counts and relationships are perhaps more subtle. Musicians need exposure, more interaction with other musicians, other disciplines and more communication. We have integrated some innovations into Marlboro, for example a wonderful program for vocalists, who used to be treated a bit like second class citizens before. We now offer an opera workshop instituted by Ken Noda from the Metropolitan Opera, as well as a great young artist’s program. “

Goode is teaching at Mannes College and master classes with Ursula Oppens at City College. “It has become increasingly apparent to me that teaching and performing are just different aspects of the same thing, being a musician, trying to look into the music and, as Horszowski said, imply reading the score and seeing what’s there!” He himself adds, “The thing I learned with Serkin is that the end result is trying to discover what’s hidden, but in order to do that you have to first exam the score and know what’s there!”

And since we are talking about “the score”, I told him about my love for the Schumann concerto. He tells me about a wonderful surprise he had one evening after the performance of my favorite concerto: “After my performance, Sotheby’s music expert Richard Roe comes backstage and asks me if I would like to see the original score of the Schumann concerto. I was burning with joy and curiosity and said, ‘Of course, when can I go see it, tomorrow?’ And there it was, the original score, full of revisions in Schumann’s beautiful handwriting right at Sotheby’s.” and with that he walked over to his shelf, searched a bit and came back with the printed facsimile of the original version that shows so clearly Schumann’s struggles to choose one of the four different versions, in the transition from the second to the third movement. The beginning had started with a different onset, with the piano starting off and the orchestra giving the third beat. Goode told me about a performance which stunned its audience, of that original first version of the score by pianist Malcom Freger at Carnegie Hall, who was a student of Karl Friedberg, who himself had studied with Clara Schumann. Tradition obliges and the score is a chapter in itself. To give testimony to that, Goode tells me that he has decided to opt more often to perform with the score. For him, memorization cuts down on the music making process: “I play better with music. Much off my playing (in chamber music) is with the music anyhow. Why learn 3 Haydn sonatas by heart if you could play fifteen with the score at hand? I feel a great deal of freedom and less intimidated by the scare of a memory slip. As long as you internalize the music it does not matter that it stands in front of you, it should be whatever works best for each performer; to translate what one thinks should be the sound.”

It’s about time someone emancipates himself from what has risen as an unwritten law of performance practice. At the end it’s all about how well one makes the music heard.

Source: <http://english.getclassical.org/>