

## Memories in Music

By Jessica Duchen  
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***Lang Lang comes to Carnegie Hall on April 26 with a program of favorite masterworks.***

Few pianists in recent years have caused such a stir as Lang Lang. The former child prodigy from China, now based in the United States, has captured audience's hearts across the globe with his virtuoso keyboard wizardry and his approachable personality. And while he is on something of a personal mission to attract younger and wider audiences to classical music, the 23-year-old pianist has also drawn the attention of such established musicians as the revered Daniel Barenboim and Christoph Eschenbach, both of whom have served as mentors. Now he is bringing to Carnegie Hall a program of pieces with a deep personal significance for him.

Most of these works are also featured on *Memory*, his latest recording for Deutsche Grammophon, which includes pieces as contrasting as an early Mozart sonata and Horowitz's transcription of Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2. The unifying theme is Lang Lang's own life and early memories. "I learned all these pieces in my childhood," he explains. "It's great to perform works I've felt close to for so many years."



Lang Lang  
photo by Kassara

The Mozart C-Major Sonata, K. 330, for example, was the very first one he learned. "Every time I play it," he says, "it brings back countless memories." One recollection is from the age of nine, when Lang Lang was rejected by a piano teacher. "I was really dejected!" he recalls. "This sonata was the piece that brought back the feeling that I should definitely play the piano."

Schumann's *Kinderszenen* brings back another vivid memory: Lang Lang's first sight of Vladimir Horowitz on TV. "It was his 1986 broadcast from Moscow," he says. "At the time, I didn't know anything about him. I just saw this older man playing this beautiful, poetic music. I wondered why so many people there were crying. I was so curious! Later I heard innumerable stories about how it was Horowitz's first time back in Moscow in six decades and better understood the special atmosphere in that concert."

Two pieces not included on the new CD, but no less

important to Lang Lang's Carnegie Hall concert, are the Rachmaninoff preludes in B-flat Major and in G Minor. "They're two of my favorite Rachmaninoff preludes and were the first pieces by him that I learned, well before any of the concertos," he says. "The technique they demand is stunning, and Rachmaninoff's big melodic lines are always emotionally involving. They also contrast well with the Schumann pieces I will play, with extroversion following introversion." That extroversion culminates in Horowitz's no-holds-barred transcription of the Liszt Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2--a work that Lang Lang first encountered in the unlikely context of *Tom and Jerry* cartoons. "Tom was my childhood idol," he says with a laugh. "That silly cat that played like a god!"

Lang Lang's enthusiasm for reaching and communicating with new audiences has led him to set up [www.langlang.fanclub.com](http://www.langlang.fanclub.com). "It's a window through which I can be in closer contact with music lovers and help to introduce new generations to classical music," he declares. "We have regular live chat sessions, and there's a plan to put master classes for young kids online and a competition to win a free plane ticket to come and hear a concert." Members get regular updates on Lang Lang's broadcasts and interviews, and the club is organizing meet-and-greet sessions with the pianist as well.

Highlights for the year ahead are plentiful: Lang Lang says he is especially looking forward to playing with the Vienna Philharmonic under Pierre Boulez in Salzburg and with the Berliner Philharmoniker under Zubin Mehta in the German capital. Additionally, he is about to make his first major recital tour of Japan, besides giving concerts in London and Paris and continuing his activities as a cultural ambassador for UNICEF, in which capacity he has recently been appearing in fund-raising efforts in Europe alongside such film stars as Richard Gere.

Nevertheless, the preparation of music always remains paramount. "My priority is to study new works," Lang Lang says. He is currently working on two new commissions from the American composers Augusta Read Thomas and Jennifer Higdon, which he will play next year.

*Jessica Duchon writes frequently about music. Her first novel, Rites of Spring, was published in March.*

*Lang Lang's newest CD, Memory, can be purchased from the Shop at Carnegie Hall for \$20 (including sales tax). The Shop is located on the First Tier level of Stern Auditorium, adjacent to the Rose Museum. Take home a piece of music history!*