

The Moon, Music & [a bit of] Mayhem

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Pianist **Ron Levy** is a musician of wide-ranging enthusiasms, a master of the standard repertoire who doesn't limit himself to the tried and true. His ears are always open to new sounds, be they overlooked gems of the past or the works of contemporary composers—many of whom have written for him—and his passion for chamber music has born fruit in the creation of such groups as the Palisades Virtuosi (one of several in which he's the pianist—profiled *Fanfare* 34:2). On his own, he's much in demand as an accompanist both for instrumentalists and singers. He's an opera coach, adjudicator, conductor, composer, impresario, teacher; Levy somehow does it all. As at home with Broadway standards as he is with Chopin or Debussy, he also loves ragtime and Gershwin, and plays Tatum transcriptions with the same grace and subtlety he bestows on Field Nocturnes. In a circuitous way it was his flair for the Great American Songbook that led to *Moonstruck*, the first of a projected series of four thematically related discs (see the appended review). As this was also the first CD of his that I'd heard, it seemed an appropriate subject with which to begin our conversation.

Q: How did you get the idea for Moonstruck?

A: Well, the whole *Moonstruck* series, first of all, was inspired by boredom (laughs). I have to make a living, so I do a lot of parties and cocktail receptions and whatnot. Sometimes, when I'm doing *The Way You Look Tonight* for the eight millionth time, my mind drifts off: It's really funny how the subconscious works. I was playing on automatic pilot, smiling at people and making people feel good, and all of a sudden I got an epiphany, a vision of an entire project complete with repertoire and album covers, and that spawned *Moonstruck*. I actually saw the first two covers in my mind's eye: it was like Zeus had just sprung fully formed.

Q: Do you play jazz in these receptions?

A: I'm a lousy jazzier but an excellent pop pianist. For twenty years I was Music Director at the Equinox Hotel up in Manchester, Vermont. And among my myriad duties was holding forth for cocktail hour and dinner. Dinner was three or four hours, so over twenty-five years one becomes pretty conversant in improvisation and the standards and whatever is hot on Broadway. I grew up admiring Shearing and some other jazz pianists and I'm a pretty good mimic, but I never studied my jazz modes. But I've got a good jazz sense of rhythm, so I don't sound like just a square white guy.

Q: That's apparent from some of the numbers on the CDs. Also, I know you're friendly with Dick Hyman, who's a renowned jazz pianist and film composer (he also composes "classical music.").

A: Absolutely. That came about because one of our dearest friends and neighbors where I grew up is Fred Messner, who is the nephew of Johnny Messner [bandleader, composer, saxophonist and vocalist during the big band/swing era], and he's a fine jazzier. Fred and Hyman were both Class of '48 at Columbia, and for years and years I remember Fred saying that he went into New York and heard Dick, who was fantastic. I really didn't know much about Dick's piano playing other than that he was legendary. About ten years back, he and James Levine issued the Joplin Rag recordings: they did it in tandem, and I was just knocked out. I'm a huge fan of ragtime. I grew up literally about a quarter of a mile from Max Morath: Max Morath came to my grammar school and high school and did his one-man shows. I suspect he inflicted them on school kids before he actually took them on the road. So I adore ragtime and I play all of Joplin's rags, along with a great deal of the Joseph Lamb rags...you know, the real classics. As a matter of fact, I started on a ragtime record myself, but the record label went under and that was the end of that.

Q: Do you sing when you entertain?

A: I do sing. I can clear a room faster than...(laughs). I've been told that I should have studied voice and I am a good singer, but I confine it to merely coaching and cajoling singers: I keep my mouth firmly shut.

Q: Discretion being the better part of valor? Sticking to instruments, your business card lists synthesizer in addition to harpsichord and piano. Is there a story behind that?

A: For years I played piano for the Albany Symphony. David Alan Miller, the conductor, always wanted to have a rock band when he was in college, so when he started conducting the Albany Symphony and they started doing special contemporary music programs, he formed an ensemble culled largely from the

orchestra's first-chair players and named us Dogs of Desire. I loved that name! I have a big Dogs of Desire poster in my studio. That's when I started playing synthesizer.

Q: Returning to Moonstruck, it may be irreverent, but my first association to the title was the movie with Cher. By the way, I just realized that Dick Hyman did the score for the film.

A: There you go, subliminal... As to the title, we were just kicking around a number of names.

Q: Of course, moonstruck is not a word than can be copyrighted and therefore is available to anyone. As they say in fiction, "any similarity to persons living or dead is purely coincidental."

A: At the time, I was thinking more along the lines of the Schoenberg [Pierrot Lunaire, which has a movement titled Moonstruck], which we're hoping to record with Marni Nixon. She's a dear, dear friend. We've done a number of concerts together and she's one of the world's great exponents of that piece. So, when I was thinking of moon pieces, I was thinking more around those lines, and then I was forcibly reminded by everybody, "You know, you're going to make connections to Cher." I thought, from a commercial standpoint, is that bad?

Q: After the "Zeus" moment, how long did it take to get the whole project off the ground?

A: For the first Moonstruck, the whole thing, from conception to realization probably was not more than five months.

Q: That's very impressive because there's so much music on the CD.

A: Part of the nice thing about reaching this age [coughs in a significant way to add a humorous accent], maturity, is that one has an acquaintance with an awful lot of repertoire. So selfishly, the first Moonstruck was a lot of my all time favorites: Crowd pleasers, favorite encores, that sort of thing. I would say three quarters of them are moon pieces, sprinkled liberally with some other things that were kind of relaxing and nocturnal, in nature if not in name. In Moonstruck II I think the density of actual moon-inspired pieces is greater.

Q: Although not all the music looks to the moon for inspiration, there's a feeling that somehow everything belongs together.

A: That's also what some reviewers have said: "very unlikely bedfellows." When you go from Fitzwilliam Virginal to Deep Purple, it's like, "say what?" But there is a thread, at least of intensity, running through the album. It was deliberately designed to be, not easy listening necessarily, because there are some pretty sophisticated pieces on there, but pleasant listening.

You might find this amusing. I have a computer guru because I'm a techno-moron and when Moonstruck first came out I gave him a copy: he had just married. The next time he came to visit he took out a cigar and said, "This is for you. We're pregnant and it's your fault. Moonstruck is my wife's favorite CD to make love to." So subsequently, when anybody bought one, I said this comes with a disclaimer, make sure if you're listening to it, wear birth control!

One thing I wanted to tell you is that when I put together CDs I'm very aware of textures, juxtapositions, colors. My dad was a very prominent architect; he even took some classes with Frank Lloyd Wright. I grew up with a very wonderful art collection in our old house and over the years I've amassed a pretty substantial one of my own. I'm very visual and I'm one of those freaks that hear a key and see a color.

Q: You have synesthesia?

A: Absolutely. Like Scriabin. There's no way I can play in the key of C or D without seeing yellow and F is blue. To a certain extent, that dictates some of my juxtapositions on the records.

Q: Deep Purple—the song, not the color—is one of those songs that I knew without knowing it, if you know what I mean. I had heard the tune but somehow never connected it with the title. Anyway, you have a real gift for that type of music. Your performances of Deep Purple, the Tatum transcription and Gershwin's Liza are to the manner born.

A: Thank you. Deep Purple is a lovely piece. It's kind of in the vein of those quasi-fantasy pieces... you can hear a little bit of Rhapsody in Blue, a bit of jazz...a lovely, lovely piece. Liza is masterful: More music born of desperation.

Q: Desperation?

A: He needed encores after countless repetitions of Rhapsody in Blue. So these things [the eighteen song transcriptions] were intended as encore pieces, as well as crystallizations of improvisations.

Q: That's what I love about them, the feeling that you're listening to him improvising.

A: Yep. That's the best way to play it, with a little loose, quasi-improvisatory feeling. If it's too square then it's kind of bland.

Q: If you're a slave to the printed page you'll lose the essence completely.

A: What I try to get my students to realize is that our notational system is good up to a point, but there's lots of stuff between the notes that's impossible to notate.

Did you enjoy my Indian rainstick, which made its debut right before the Chinese piece? I have this rainstick, which is also going to appear in *Moonstruck III*: It was really happy to be included, it was smiling. It's a perfect match for the music's imagery and mood.

Q: Yes, I did hear the rainstick. Give it my compliments. I suspect the Chinese piece [Jian-Zhong Wang: Colorful Clouds Chasing the Moon] will be a discovery for most people, but Träumerei, of course, is a perennial audience favorite. Somehow I always think of trauma when I read the title, even though I know it really means "dreams" or "reveries."

A: (laughing) That's funny, because that's what I thought when I was young. I used to be a barnstorming virtuoso and I used to love tearing through the Liszt Hungarian Rhapsodies. One time, between the first and second section of No.2, I dove on the keys when the second section started and my teacher said, "Can you do that again?" So I did it again and she asked me, "What are you doing?" "Well, it says lunga. Doesn't that mean lunge?" I thought it was dramatic. I still do it out of deference to my misconception as a youngster: I didn't know it meant "long." I think it's cool! Lunge forward!

Here's another one for you: I was very precocious and after a few months I decided I wanted to do Chopin's Minute Waltz. I'd barely learned how to read music, but I brought it in. I was very proud of myself and I played it very fast. As I finished I looked up and my teacher had this incredibly bewildered expression, "What are you doing?" I said, "I love this pieces, isn't it good?" She said, "But, you're leaving out all the flats!" I said, "What's a flat?" Try playing the Minute Waltz in the Dorian mode, it's really something.

Q: Once I stop laughing, I have a serious question for you. Given that Moonstruck I and II convey a certain atmosphere across the diversity of repertoire, I was wondering if you ever modified your interpretations to blend in with the album concept? Would you have played some of the music differently in another context?

A: No. I firmly believe that every piece of music creates its own sound world. It's like a little bubble. And within that bubble, it has its own rules, its own realities. So I know exactly what you're asking me, and the answer, again, is no, I would never play it softer, faster, louder, in order to integrate it better. Viscerally, I can't do that, any more than I could play a favorite Schubert piece faster or slower: it just has its own internal validity and implications. When I'm in the zone and playing, I feel connected to that inner validity, that bubble, and I lose all sense of self. When I'm playing well, it's completely right brain and intuitive. Sometimes a commissioned composer may have a different feeling about a piece from my own, but I have to be true to my intuition. Ultimately, if I'm unhappy, I can't do a successful performance.

Q: What will Moonstruck III and IV be like?

A: Volume III, *New Moon*, is going to be contemporary chamber music devoted. We'll have Fauré, Martinu, and four commissions from composer friends of mine: Paul Somers, Godfrey Schroth, Steve Perillo, and a wild Walpurgisnacht-like ride entitled "Lunacy," by Hawaiian composer Donald Reid Womack. (I'm premiering it in Hawaii at the University of Hawaii next month). There will also be Two Rhapsodies, by Loeffler, and a premiere recorded performance of Lowell Liebermann's recent composition, "Night Music," with Palisades Virtuosi.

Volume IV, *Song to the Moon*, will include the *Moonstruck* movement from *Lunaire* and great art songs and arias of Debussy, Strauss, and Brahms, as well as Dvorak's title aria.

Q: There are many familiar pieces on the first two albums, but also some attractive rarities: The Sherbakyov, for example.

A: Oh, Sherbakyov. Now that's a really interesting piece. From time to time you see these collections of Russian pieces emerge: because of the embargo that was in effect for many years we couldn't get Russian music. Even mainstream works, Shostakovich, Khatchaturian, were not available. I don't know what's going on now, but from time to time you get these old albums that surface, with horrible onionskin paper that disintegrates as you're looking at it. But anyway, I was struck by this little miniature by Sherbakyov and I was thinking, gee, with the whole tone scales and the mood, it's not unlike Debussy. It actually predates Debussy's *Claire de Lune* and some of his early works. Then a couple of years went by and I learned that Debussy had been the music teacher to Madame von Meck's children. So he was in Russia. I started to wonder if the men met and discussed some interesting new things that they were dabbling in, or maybe Sherbakyov heard Debussy play some of his early works. But it's a fact that

Sherbakov's piece is called *Claire de Lune* and I don't know of any other *Clair de Lunes* preceding Debussy's, so who knows? Also, I don't know of any Impressionist pieces that use the whole tone scale as pervasively as the Sherbakov. It's much earlier even than Debussy's *Pour le piano*, which helped to popularize whole tone scales and augmented chords. It's fun to conjecture.

Q: I recently read that Debussy didn't like to be called an Impressionist.

A: Right. Tough (both laugh).

Q: Whatever he felt about it, it stuck.

A: Like it or not, you are! Kidding aside, I think one of the reasons for Debussy not liking that sobriquet is that both he and Ravel had had their music butchered by sloppy, over-pedaled performances. As a matter of fact, Ravel said, "Play my music like Liszt, damn it!" People were just not clean in the harmonies and they were limp-wristed when there's strength in the music.

Q: Earlier you mentioned the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, from which you've chosen Robin. What led you to record it on Moonstruck?

A: The prevailing mood. In my mind's eye I always pictured that piece at dusk. It's got that kind of quasi-mournful, dark quality. That's one of the pieces that isn't necessarily a moon piece, but it blends in nicely. Furthermore, I love that period: When I did my debut in New York, instead of opening with the obligatory Scarlatti or Mozart, I opened with the Fitzwilliam.

Do you know, I just played a clavichord (a close relative of the virginal), for the very first time last night? I did a Schumann retrospective up in Ringwood, New Jersey. We were warming up in the church's anteroom and there was this peculiar looking thing they said was a harpsichord, "but it's a really weak instrument." So I sat down and I said, oh my God, this is not a harpsichord, this is a clavichord! It's not meant to be as carrying in volume as a harpsichord. It was so delightful that I played a couple of the Fitzwilliams on it. Actually, I had wanted to record on either a virginal or a clavichord for the first selection on the *For the Children* album. We found one and were negotiating to use it but finally the owner said he didn't want it moved.

Q: I can't blame him, it's probably very delicate.

A: Yeah, so I used the lute stop on the harpsichord. For the *Children* was so much fun because I could play all these keyboards and get a lot of variety onto the CD.

Q: I loved the celesta in the Tchaikovsky [Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy]. The Ravel [Empress of the Pagodas] has a similar light, exotic flavor, even though it's played on the piano.

A: By the way, you know that the Ravel is for four hands and I'm very proud to say that I overdubbed myself and I don't think you can tell. The engineer said he never heard a musician overdub himself so well. It was beginner's luck, I'd probably stink at it, now.

Q: It's not an easy thing. In fact, it would seem impossible if I didn't know that some musicians have done it successfully.

A: It was very tricky. I had to memorize any rubato because otherwise I wouldn't be with myself.

Q: Could you listen to yourself as you were playing the second part, or was that too confusing?

A: Yes, I did listen, and it was a bit bizarre. I also overdubbed the celesta but in that case, I couldn't listen to the piano part because of the way the celesta had to be recorded. The Stravinsky duet is not overdubbed, but I played it with my own student, who was six years old at the time.

Q: I assume you let him play the lead?

A: We switched. I did the lead on the second one, he did the lead on the first one. That's why the rhythm is slightly funky, but I love it, because Stravinsky intended those to be played by children. It was great fun and he was just cuter than you can imagine.

Q: He's obviously talented, too. When I heard it, I thought you might have played the lead on the second one: it sounded just a little more polished.

A: Well, all he had to do was just go...[illustrates a simple rhythmic accompaniment]. But the real challenge was, you have about fifty measures of the same thing, so he had to remember when to stop (laughs heartily).

When we recorded the first one it wasn't going so well, and it got worse and worse and finally he just stopped, looked at me, and said, "Mr. Levy, I'm *nervous*" (imitating a child's voice). So we took a little break, gave him a pep talk, and then he was a champ.

Q: What led you to record For the Children?

A: The whole jumping off point for that was the hundredth anniversary of Debussy's Children's Corner. Also, that's the same year the Mother Goose turned a hundred [Ravel's *Ma mère l'oye*]. That was where I started and then I said, "What the hell do I pair with Children's Corner?" Around the same time, Dick Hyman gave me the Baby Boom waltz, so things started to click; babies, children's corner, and the rest is history.

Q: Have you ever played it for children to see how they react to it?

A: Absolutely! It puts them right out. So children and parents love it (laughs). Actually, kids *do* love it. My students, of course, like to listen to the ones they're doing, the Toccata, the Für Elise: they say, "Oh, that's how it's supposed to be played."

Q: You play some very entertaining pieces for piano and percussion by John Lampkin.

A: John is a great educator with a wonderful sense of humor and he writes music that kids love to play. He's a really dear friend. It wasn't originally written with drums but the March and the Count Basie just begged it. It was nice to add a little something different.

Q: Along those lines, you've added a snippet of children at play before the Mussorgsky and it sounded like your voice doing the narration to the Ravel.

A: That's Bob McGrath, from Sesame Street. Surprise! (laughs)

Q: I've never seen the score, did Ravel write the introduction?

A: I think he did. We took that right out of the score. The narration is never done but it was perfect for the friendly voice of Bob McGrath. Bob is an old friend and he's on the board of directors of my trio: We do a lot of performing with him. If we do a narration piece, very often he's our guest.

Q: I loved Copland's Cat and Mouse [Check title].

A: (laughing) I was known as Mr. Cat and Mouse when I was young. That was one of my omnipresent recital pieces: I couldn't get away from it. You know how Rachmaninoff referred to the C# minor Prelude as IT? [Rachmaninoff reputedly grew to hate the piece as he was invariably asked to perform it]. Well, no matter what else I planned to play, people would say, "You're going to play Cat and Mouse, aren't you?"

Q: You play it so well, it's understandable that they would love it.

A: It's a great piece, a really great piece. Did you know that was his first published piece? It was published right after he came back from studying with Nadia Boulanger.

Q: Moving from Copland to Poulenc, I'd never heard his Nocturne before listening to Moonstruck.

A: Hardly anybody has. That was a revelation to my teacher, Joseph Schwartz, when I sent him a copy of the CD: "Gee, I'm not that familiar with the Poulenc Nocturnes." The music corresponds exactly to the quote in the booklet, the one about the gal who's languishing upstairs in the sickroom? Can't you just hear that?

Q: Yes, it's somewhat mournful. You mention your teacher, Joseph Schwartz. Tell me a bit more about your early days.

A.: Well, I had this really lovely grandmotherly first piano teacher—she was the one who looked so horrified. She was one of these small town teachers and she realized that she had a dynamo. Ultimately, to her credit, she put me in touch with a lady up in Rockland County who really solidified my love of practicing and playing and also, she was very interested in contemporary music. That was Diana Arlyck. And then, after a few years, she realized she'd taken me about as far as she could, so she put me in touch with Leland Thompson at Juilliard. Then it became a whole different thing, because that was a no nonsense, professional time to work. I'll be ever grateful to Lee, she instilled in me a sense of discipline and serving the music. She got it directly from the Lhévinnes.

All that was pre-college and then I wanted to go to Curtis, but Lee said no, she said there's this fellow at Oberlin, he just started teaching there: it was the same Russian training, and it was Joe Schwartz. Joe was great for me. We were very close and he was very...he was kind of the opposite of Lee, who was a bit of a martinet and dour. Joe was warm and supportive, not to mention a phenomenal pianist and musician. He really got me to loosen up and become, I think, who I am now. And then, after I got out of there, I just started doing a lot of playing.

Q: How did you find engagements?

A: I've always enjoyed collaboration and yes, I did a lot of solo playing, but when I was in Oberlin I haunted just about every studio there, clarinet, trumpet, etc, and when I left, found I had skills that were marketable.

Q: Are you a good sight-reader?

A: I was a good sight-reader at ten, once I learned my flats. Part of the reason I was a good sight-reader was that I was absolutely voracious. By the time I graduated from high school, I knew the repertoire. I had purchased the music and I had read through all of Bach, Beethoven, and Schumann. That was basically because I loved to sight-read. I didn't even know at the time that I was helping my brain to learn a skill that would stand me in good stead.

Q: I'm guessing you're also good at transposition, since you work with so many singers.

A: Well, that's one thing I'm very queasy about, in the Gerald Moore vein. Do you know that story when he was accompanying Gedda? Moore didn't like to transpose. In my case, I think it's because a lot of my playing is right-brain, it's not conscious, so my eyes scan and my fingers do it. So when I have to transpose, I have to throw a little bit left-brain at what I'm doing. And I presume that Moore was very similar.

Apparently, Gedda was not in good voice one night and he said, "Gerry, can you put it down a tone and a half?" Moore said, "I really don't like to do this," but Gedda begged him, saying he'd never get through the song (a Brahms lied) otherwise. So they started out and Moore was feeling his oats. They got into the development section and he was feeling really good, except he saw the veins standing out in Gedda's neck. As they went offstage, Gedda said, "What the hell are you doing to me?" Apparently, somewhere in the process, instead of winding up down, he was up!

Q: I feel guilty for laughing, Gedda must have suffered! Well, I hope your difficulties with transposition haven't led to any similar "assaults" on a singer's vocal chords. Besides being an accompanist, you're a very active soloist. How did you develop that side of your career?

A: I made the rounds of competitions and the YCA thing [Young Concert Artists] and I had allies and pals at Juilliard. You stick around and you show up at enough places, people start to say, oh, it's him again.

Q: In short, a combination of desire and persistence.

A: That what I tell everybody. If you feel that inner drive and you work hard and you have the goods...I don't have to play with the New York Phil to feel fulfilled. I'm very happy to play with a community orchestra and I derive great joy from it.

Q: Also, it would be wrong to automatically relegate community orchestras to a markedly inferior status: The standard of execution today is so improved.

A: I'm on the board of the Bergen Philharmonic here in New Jersey and we just had a concerto competition. Now, I remember what the field of a concerto competition twenty-five years ago would sound like. You'd get a handful of people that were promising, with some shipwrecks and you'd get one or two really big hotshots. Well, this was for strings and we had ten people that sounded like Heifetz or Piategorsky. Standards are just through the roof.

The whole audition/competition process can be difficult and ultimately, young people, for whom I feel intensely sympathetic and sorry for, have to realize that they can't try to please everybody because it ain't going to work: There's fresh meat coming down the pike very other moment. You have to be in it for yourself and for your own gratification.

Q: It's a conundrum that probably confronts every thoughtful performer. You seem to have found the answer for yourself, as it's clear you love to perform.

A: Yes, I enjoy it very, very much. Mostly because when I'm performing, I feel I have more access to energy and resources than when I'm sitting by myself. It puts me in touch even more directly with the composer.

Q: If it's possible to single out one performance of yours as the most memorable, which would it be?

A: Well, there have been many, but my most memorable concerto experience was a 2005 appearance with the Capella Cracoviensis Orchestra in Krakow, Poland, playing Tchaikovsky's Third Piano Concerto and Gershwin's I Got Rhythm Variations. The orchestra was very good in the Tchaikovsky, but, surprisingly, shone in the Gershwin! After the Scriabin Nocturne for the Left Hand encore, which I dedicated to the late Polish Pope—I learned a few sentences, which I delivered in Polish—I got one of those ovations of rhythmic applause, the European equivalent of a standing ovation. I could have asked for the keys to the city, at that point. After the concert, we were treated to a first-class French dinner at a local establishment, which stayed open late just for us. The owner asked me to sign their guest book, which happened to be right under Rostropovich!

And one of the most thoughtful things that ever happened to me: the conductor, who knew I was a fan of Szymanowski, arranged for us to be "abducted" by the orchestra manager, who picked us up in a

limousine and wouldn't tell us where we were headed. After going up, up, into the Polish Alps, we finally arrived at the village of Zakopane, where Szymanowski lived. The government gave permission for the house to be opened, and I actually was able to sit at his piano and sight-read a song from an original manuscript that was propped up there! Two weeks after this, I was in Lincoln Center, playing Szymanowski's Myths!

Q: I've recently seen his chalet in Unquiet Traveler, a DVD about Piotr Anderszewski, the Polish pianist. Speaking of pianos, I really enjoyed the sound of the Yamaha you play on your CDs, which surprised me: I don't usually like them

A: Me, neither. Here's the story. I record at Bennett Studios in Englewood, New Jersey.

Q: Is there a connection to Tony Bennett?

A: Yes. His son, Dae, is the chief engineer there and oversees the whole operation. When I first walked in, they had two pianos: one was a Bösendorfer and the other was the Yamaha. I didn't even look at the Yamaha. My attitude was, I detest Yamahas: Sound like metal to me. I liked the Bösendorfer very much. When I came in to do my first recording, Dae said, "I've got really bad news." Apparently, they'd had a jazzier in there that had trashed the other piano. He did a Jerry Lee Lewis and kicked the lyre right off. The studio decided not to bring the piano back as it was too persnickety, so they got rid of it, and there was the Yamaha looking at me, whimpering. Just out of curiosity, I went over and did a couple of chords and a scale and I fell in love. I said, "I adore this piano!" Now, I will not go to any other recording studio. It is a dream piano. It's so responsive that I can immediately realize whatever I imagine in terms of color and execution.

Q: Did you read A Romance on Three Legs? [the story of Glenn Gould's "love affair" with a particular Steinway]

A: Yes, but it's heartbreaking. It was like losing a lover. He went around looking for something he loved as much and he couldn't find it. And he didn't want to do that gig with the Cleveland to begin with.

Q: I once read something that Liszt wrote about the role of the piano in his life and have looked in vain for it, since. He expressed himself in marvelously poetic language and imagery, which sadly I'm unable to precisely recall, but the gist of it was that the piano was his life.

A: That's absolutely true for me, as well. The piano has been just an incredible...it's as close to a religious experience as I get, seriously, because it takes me out of myself and puts me in contact with the great minds and spirits of the past. I've had a lot of losses in my life, and it's always an incredible, incredible consolation.