

## Igor Begelman at the Kravis Center

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### **Igor Begelman's recital delivers classics – and populist appeal**

By GREG STEPANICH

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If you're a classical clarinet player, it's hard to play a recital and not pay some sort of homage to popular music traditions that are so indelibly associated with your instrument.

Igor Begelman, Ukraine-born and long-time resident in the United States, made no attempt to shun them during his recital Tuesday at the Kravis Center's Rinker Playhouse; indeed, he welcomed them, and that gave his concert an extra fillip of populist appeal, endearing him to his audience.

Joined by fine Russian pianist Alexander Moutouzkine, Begelman opened his concert in good modernist style with the five 'Dance Preludes' of Witold Lutoslawski, written by the Polish master in 1954. Begelman played with a slightly rough, broad and reedy sound. In the bubblier dances, particularly No. 5, his technical command was impressive; in the slower dances, especially No. 2, he showed himself equally capable of sustaining long melodic lines.

The Claude Debussy 'Première Rhapsodie' had sweep and a big, epic sound, though I would have preferred more mystery and sensitivity in the first entrance and recurrences of the main theme.

The first half closed with the 'Grand Duo Concertante' (in B-flat, Opus 48) of Carl Maria von Weber. Begelman was very effective here in the dark, moody second movement, in which a certain huskiness of tone made a strong contrast to the powerful opening movement and the lilting third.

The finest playing of the recital came after intermission, with an excellent reading of the 'Poulenc Clarinet Sonata,' written in 1961. Begelman's sound was noticeably mellower and more focused, which benefited Poulenc's sparkling, spiky writing significantly. Moutouzkine was a fine partner here, a player who knows how to elicit a huge dynamic



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range from the piano, and whose clear marking of the various changes in style infused this music with the element of surprise that helps makes it so charming.

High points in the Poulenc included the second movement in general, played with great tenderness by both men, and the finale, in which Begelman handled the speedy main theme with expert fingers and took the leaps into the instrument's higher registers with confidence and without over-blowing.

The concert concluded with Begelman's transcription of Jascha Heifetz's suite from the opera 'Porgy and Bess' of George Gershwin. In these four pieces, the clarinetist brought several jazzy techniques to the music: a throaty growl in the low register, bent notes and plenty of short chromatic-scale appoggiaturas to slide up to the notes of the melodies. It was a bit overdone, a little too pushy; tunes as good as 'Bess, You Is My Woman Now' and 'Summertime' don't need much done to them to come across well.

The audience loved it, though, and brought Begelman back for an encore, which turned out to be 'Intermezzo,' by Russian jazz bandleader Alexander Tsfasman (1906-71). This light, inoffensive piece was pure 1930s, from its softshoe-like opening section to its yearning-ballad middle, but it was skillfully done, and Begelman played it with grace and panache.