

## Artist Management

pianist Christopher Taylor  
The Chicago Symphony  
Bernstein: Age of Anxiety/Symphony #2

*"A two-fisted talent with lightning reflexes..."*

Chicago Tribune

Christopher Taylor with Christophe Eschenbach and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

By John Von Rhein

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra's final weekend of concerts at Ravinia this season was prime Christoph Eschenbach, a blur of activity that attested to his compulsion for packing as many different musical experiences as possible into a tight schedule. Once again everyone got caught up in his workaholic zeal. These may not have been the most polished performances of the summer, but they definitely were among the most exciting.

Although Eschenbach won't sign off as music director until later this week, Ravinia took the opportunity Sunday night to pay tribute to his nine years via a film tribute featuring affectionate testimonials from artists and festival officials including Welz Kauffman, Daniel Barenboim, Itzhak Perlman, Pinchas Zukerman, Yo-Yo Ma and his successor James Conlon. Clearly overwhelmed, Eschenbach praised "the greatest audience, and orchestra too, that I can imagine" as the crowd gave him a heartfelt early send-off.

He will be remembered for so much, not least his nurturing some of the best emerging young instrumental talent. The weekend brought us four such soloists—the return of his star protégé, pianist Lang Lang, on Sunday and cellist Claudio Bohorquez on Friday; and the debuts of pianist Christopher Taylor on Sunday and violist Kim Kashkashian on Saturday.

Lang is scheduled to perform Mozart works for piano with his mentor Monday in the Martin Theatre, but each pianist had an opportunity to play two-handed Mozart and Beethoven on Sunday, and each made the music very much his own. Back for a fifth summer at Ravinia, Lang capped off the summer's Beethoven piano concerto cycle with as magisterial a reading of the Fourth Concerto in G Major as one has heard in a great while. It hardly needs to be said that it was immaculately played; as a technician of the keyboard, the 21-year-old Lang stands tall among pianists of his generation. But it's his musical understanding—which owes much to intensive coaching with Eschenbach and Barenboim—that made the difference. There was grandeur in every gesture, but not the self-indulgent

kind one hears in some of his Romantic forays; there was poetic refinement, grace, warmth and proportion too. Kindred musical spirits, Lang and Eschenbach lived gloriously in the moment, and so did Beethoven. The Concerto No. 12 in A, K.414, is Mozart at his most innocently beguiling, and Eschenbach, in one of his relatively rare concerto appearances, treated it in that sunny spirit, handling his dual role as pianist and conductor with Barenboim-like spontaneity.

Eschenbach also wrapped up his summer cycle of his mentor Leonard Bernstein's three symphonies with the Symphony No. 2 ("The Age of Anxiety") for piano and orchestra. The music's melodramatic rhetoric and jazzy exuberance have held up better than the portentous and overblown "Kaddish," heard a week earlier. **But a lot of one's appreciation of the score had to do with the gutsy authority with which Eschenbach and Taylor threw themselves into the swing rhythms. A two-fisted talent with lightning reflexes, Taylor made one eager to hear his Ravinia solo recital, devoted to Messiaen's wondrous "Vingt Regards," on Aug. 27.**

Berlioz's symphony with solo viola, "Harold en Italie," shared the Saturday CSO program with excerpts from Prokofiev's "Romeo and Juliet" ballet. Eschenbach's 50-minute suite of excerpts from Prokofiev's ballet struck a fine balance between theatrical atmosphere and symphonic weight. "Harold en Italie," part of the summer's Berlioz salute, summoned no little dramatic power from conductor and orchestra. Playing the obligato viola part in her Ravinia debut, Kashkashian proved every bit as colorful and committed. She is among the most accomplished solo violists America

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has produced in decades.

Saturday's agenda also included the premiere of "Aftermath: The Dance," choreographed by Venetia Stifler to Ned Rorem's song cycle "Aftermath" that was commissioned by Ravinia and premiered here last summer. This is music too important not to be heard again and again. The six Ruth Page Dance Series dancers made every fluid movement resonate with stark emotion. Nathaniel Webster was the superb baritone soloist.