



BEETHOVEN FESTIVAL: **REVOLUTION 2012**

VIEW FROM THE PRESS



Best Quotes:

“George Lepauw’s Beethoven Festival is back and bursting at the seams.” (Mia Clarke, Time Out Chicago)

“Chicago now has a substantial (and hopefully regular) classical music festival that can rival those on the coasts.”
(Alexander Hough, the Chicagoist)

“Beethoven Festival: Revolution 2012 will leave a ripple effect in the Chicago art community not only due to the exceptional quality of performances from artists and musicians, but for its bravery of scale and scope and reach.”
(Elysabeth Alfano, Huffington Post)

“...fraying duct tape left a trace of adhesive on my pants, but that was a small price to pay for such unflinching artistic standards.”
(Michael Cameron, Chicago Classical Review)

“Richly stocked Beethoven Fest is city’s best-kept cultural secret, so far. [...] Lepauw, a prodigious pianist who lives in Paris but maintains close ties to Chicago, along with hundreds of other participants from nearly a dozen countries, are honoring Beethoven in a big – nay, mammoth – way this week. [...] The scope is as boundless as the imagination and energies of Lepauw, its artistic director. [...] “Revolution 2012” is something you can’t catch anywhere else on the planet, an event of world-class importance, and I hope it succeeds in attracting the audiences it deserves. [...] A BYOB policy tells you you’re not in Orchestra Hall anymore.” (John von Rhein, Chicago Tribune)

“Imagine a music festival where just one day’s events wind up running four hours longer than *Parsifal*. Such was Wednesday’s installment of the Beethoven Festival in Chicago. Brainchild of the indefatigable pianist George Lepauw [...] now in its second year, [the festival] truly is a unique and unprecedented event in Chicago. [...] In addition to being a prodigiously gifted pianist, Lepauw proved a personable and engaging host with his introductions and brief interviews with musicians setting an inviting air of relaxed informality. [...] Later in the evening, Lepauw asked the visibly spent Tétreault to encore the Bach Cello Suite he had played eight hours earlier—not a movement, but the entire suite. To his credit, the gracious young Canadian did not poke Lepauw in the eye with his bow but performed the Bach once again, with burnished tone and even deeper feeling than earlier in the day. It was approaching midnight but the evening was not yet over...” (Lawrence Johnson, Classical Review)

“[...] programming showed unusual imagination and freshness of delivery.” (Alan Artner, Chicago Tribune)

“The sheer energy, enthusiasm and blind disregard for the easy way out in the name of art was infectious. George Lepauw has started something truly remarkable that seems to be taking on a life of its own.” (Austin Wulliman, Spektral Quartet Blog)

“The Beethoven Festival closed Sunday with all due revolutionary fervor. [...] programming excess and “just one more thing” is part of the Beethoven Festival’s charm. [...] After 60 events in nine days, what will Lepauw and company do for an encore next year? I’ll be there to find out.” (Lawrence Johnson, Chicago Classical Review)

Best excerpts/articles (reduced form):

Andrew Patner, Sun-Times

"Northbrook, Chicago or Paris? It's hard sometimes to tell which is the real home of young pianist and not-for-profit impresario George Lepauw. With a busy concert and recital career of his own, the bilingual, bicultural musician who shook up classical music presentation last year by offering a week-plus Beethoven Festival in Pilsen, is back this fall with "Revolution 2012."

Mia Clarke, Time Out Chicago

"George Lepauw's Beethoven Festival is back and bursting at the seams. After the success of last year's debut in Pilsen, the intrepid pianist and founder of the International Beethoven Project heads north with another imaginative, multi-disciplinary extravaganza. Anchored at Uptown's National Pastime Theater, the BYOB showcase presents top local talent in addition to premiere performances by up-and-coming international sensations, cramming more than 60 inclusive, community-driven events into nine days."

Alexander Hough, The Chicagoist

"The Beethoven Festival has almost doubled in size to become nine days filled with 60+ multidisciplinary events. Drawing on local talent as well as burgeoning national and international acts, Chicago now has a substantial (and hopefully regular) classical music festival that can rival those on the coasts.

There'll be plenty of music by the man himself - the opening night features Beethoven's Violin Concerto (James Ehnes, soloist) and Second Symphony and the closing night has Chicago's first full staging of the ballet *Creatures of Prometheus*, with lots of chamber and solo music in between - but there will also be music from a range of composers spanning from Beethoven's contemporaries to those writing today, as well as rock, folk, and pop (singers premiere songs inspired by Beethoven), jazz and blues (Ernest Dawkins and Jimmy Burns), and dance music (an "exploration of dance forms from the middle ages to 2012" scheduled to run from 12:00 a.m. to 4:00 a.m. late Saturday night)."

Allie Carlisle, Newcity

"Beethoven is recognized as one of the greatest composers of classical music—and yet, the full force of his genius has, for many, been reduced to little more than a history lesson. George Lepauw wants to change that, and to change how we experience classical music.

Beethoven was not just a musical genius, says Lepauw, but also a "cultural activist," a deeply humanistic thinker influenced by the democratic ideals of the French Revolution. "He hoped that this music would live on for many generations and help the world come together. It's really a testament to his genius that we're still playing and loving his music today," says Lepauw.

Lepauw grew up in Paris, and clarifies that when he says festival, he means something a little more involved than, say, a few days at Grant Park. "My idea of a festival is that the city in which a festival takes place is entirely engaged in that festival," he explains, so "when you go out afterward, to dinner, or for drinks, everybody there is talking about what's going on at the festival, everybody there is participating." So Lepauw is bringing a more European festival to Chicago, in the hope that the city will get to know each other a little more. And of course, getting to know the music is one of the goals, too. Even for people who like classical music, experiencing it can often be a solitary activity. The Beethoven Festival, with sixty events over ten days in various venues, is an attempt to bring back to that experience a more social element by encouraging collective engagement. Lepauw explains: "Beethoven revolutionized the art of music. We are trying to revolutionize the art of presenting culture."

The festival puts that attempt at the forefront this year with its theme: Promethean Revolution."

Elysabeth Alfano, Huffington Post

"I love that I live in a city where anything is possible, where one person can make a difference, where there is room enough to create and live out loud with the general support of community and government. I live in Chicago and I write the above sentence in honor of French-American pianist and fellow Chicagoan, George Lepauw. George, a young man in his early thirties with doe like eyes and a full head of brown wavy hair that flows backwards from a large tuft in the front, his image just begging to be drawn up in caricature in *The New Yorker*, is a seasoned international musician. He began studying the piano at the age of three in Paris with Aida Barenboim, the mother of renowned international conductor, Daniel Barenboim. He first performed at the age of ten and continued studying in Paris until he came to the States for college at Georgetown and then his masters at Northwestern for a Masters of Music in Piano Performance.

In addition to being an accomplished pianist, George is also passionate about how people experience music and art. It is with this in mind that he began the Beethoven Festival in Chicago, in its second year beginning this September 8th and running for nine days through the 16th. The theme of this year's festival is Revolution and explores themes of Promethean revolution through art, music, dance, literature, and film. Named in recognition of Beethoven's groundbreaking compositions and admiration for the ideals of the French Revolution, Beethoven Festival: Revolution 2012 is also a reflection of the impact that today's game-changing political and social events have on music and art. Artistic Director Lepauw states: "We seek to instigate a revolution where art can bring people together and inspire more thoughtful and creatively-engaged citizens of the world. 2012 is a critical year as we continue to define the 21st century. We believe that culture has a primary role to play in promoting peace. This Beethoven Festival is purposely built to be an intensely concentrated, nearly non-stop event blurring the lines between life and performance in ways that encourage positive human relations between audience members and artists, and as an idea to live on beyond the confines of the festival. Beethoven, a believer in human rights and in the power of art to change the world, serves as our greatest inspiration."

It is one thing to say that you are going to create a revolution. It is another thing to actually create a revolution, which is what George is doing. Filling a gap in the large and important Chicago art community, George has created a medium sized, powerful festival bringing in huge names from around the world in music and art, some of whom are appearing for the first time in Chicago. In this jam-packed, nine-day festival, constant art, music and dance, plus a lecture series, are served up as a way to help audience members re-consider their involvement in community and politics through art. All of this is accomplished from George's steadfast vision, determination and dedication to music, and the arts in general. Beethoven Festival: Revolution 2012 will leave a ripple effect in the Chicago art community not only due to the exceptional quality of performances from artists and musicians, but for its bravery of scale and scope and reach."

Michael Cameron, Chicago Classical Review

"If the visuals inside and out were rough around the edges, organizers more than compensated by assembling a top notch chamber orchestra and inviting New York Philharmonic principal assistant conductor Daniel Boico and soloist James Ehnes, one of the finest violinists on the planet. Adding even more star power, Zarin Mehta was on hand to accept the IBP's Beethoven Spirit Award.

The festival performs an important service by commissioning new works, including Saturday's opener, David Winkler's *Forza Vita* Festival Overture. Brimming with nobility and grandeur, it made for an effective curtain raiser.

There was a time when many violinists performed the imposing opening movement [of Beethoven's Violin Concerto] at a snail's pace in the misguided hope that ponderous equals profound. The Canadian native chose a smart tempo, avoiding many of the fussy mannerisms that have accumulated in this mammoth concerto over the centuries. The sweet lyricism of his second movement soared into every corner of the hall, and expressions of deep appreciation could be seen on patrons and musicians alike. I don't recall ever hearing a more probing, intelligent, and moving account of this warhorse.

Beethoven's *Coriolan* Overture and Second Symphony were nearly as good, suffused by Boico with crackling intensity, and sustained with focused attention to structure and dynamic differentiation.

The acoustics on the ground level were mildly disappointing during the first half, but a seat on the lower balcony for the symphony was much better, boasting warm, burnished string sound and gleaming woodwind luster. Granted, fraying duct tape left a trace of adhesive on my pants, but that was a small price to pay for such unfailing artistic standards."

John von Rhein, Chicago Tribune

"Richly stocked Beethoven Fest is city's best-kept cultural secret, so far. Although the 250th anniversary of Ludwig van Beethoven's birth won't arrive until 2020, George Lepauw isn't about to wait eight years to celebrate the German composer's titanic musical achievement, or the profound influence his music has exerted on the evolution of Western classical music.

Lepauw, a prodigious pianist who lives in Paris but maintains close ties to Chicago, along with hundreds of other participants from nearly a dozen countries, are honoring Beethoven in a big – nay, mammoth – way this week. Already in progress is the second annual "Beethoven Festival: Revolution 2012," organized and presented by the Chicago-based International Beethoven Project. The fest is based at the historic National Pastime Theater in Uptown Chicago, with free talks and master classes at five other area venues. You owe it to yourself to check out some or all of it.

What began last year as an event spanning 25 events in five days has grown to comprise 60 events in nine days and nights. The scope is as boundless as the imagination and energies of Lepauw, its artistic director. And while there's plenty of Beethoven to be heard, the offerings reach far beyond, to jazz, rock, dance and film, along with newly commissioned music and visual art works that reflect the master's revolutionary and Promethean ideals and inspire artists and listeners alike to this day.

The festival's goal, Lepauw further explains, is to define what revolution means in contemporary artistic, philosophical and political terms, and to find ways to reinvigorate the great traditions of music and art that have come down to us from Beethoven's era – "seeing the creative process up close," as he puts it.

That's a lofty objective for an Off Loop festival operating on a modest budget of about \$300,000, with the majority of guest artists accepting a reduced fee, and a couple of local performers and groups donating their fees back to the festival. But "Revolution 2012" is something you can't catch anyplace else on the planet, an event of world-class importance, and I hope it succeeds in attracting the audiences it deserves. Thus far, it hasn't.

The festival's main venue, a former Masonic hall from the 1920s that is in the throes of renovation, looks a bit shabby and is accessible only by elevator or by walking up four flights of stairs. But the acoustics and performers are generally excellent, and that's what counts. Audience members are encouraged to view, and even purchase, newly commissioned, Beethoven-related works displayed along the auditorium walls. A BYOB policy tells you you're not in Orchestra Hall anymore.

Thirty-four events await between now and Sunday. What are you waiting for?

Lawrence Johnson, Classical Review

"Imagine a music festival where just one day's events wind up running four hours longer than *Parsifal*.

Such was Wednesday's installment of the Beethoven Festival in Chicago. Brainchild of the indefatigable pianist George Lepauw, the midpoint of this nine-day series presented an almost unbroken ten-hour marathon serving up repertoire from Bach to Ysaye.

I did the full immersion from Stéphane Tétrault's performance of Bach's Cello Suite No. 1 in G major at 3 p.m. to various encores and a final Q&A at 12:45 a.m. Thursday morning.

Needless to say, nearly ten hours of continuous music is not for everybody. But Lepauw's festival, now in its second year, truly is a unique and unprecedented event in Chicago. Even with the inevitable program changes and on-the-fly reshuffling, Wednesday's events found a nice organic flow with a dizzying variety of repertoire and consistently high level of performance. Keeping this moveable musical feast on track is a daunting task. Yet, in addition to being a prodigiously gifted pianist, Lepauw proved a personable and engaging host with his introductions and brief interviews with musicians setting an inviting air of relaxed informality.

The visual element is a key component of the festival's theme, "Revolution 2012." Several young artists' creations are displayed on the walls, the idea being to "embody Beethoven's revolutionary spirit," says festival curator Catinca Tabacaru. Throughout the day and during Wednesday's performances, painter Justin Steimer worked on a high mural to the left of the stage, and it was a rare and fascinating genre-crossing experience to see his painting progress as the performances unfolded.

Along with several of Chicago's top musicians and ensembles, Lepauw has corralled a number of Europe-based colleagues. Most of these young musicians are unknown stateside but many are destined to have major careers.

The informal festival ambiance with its close-up proximity of the performers makes for unique moments. When Soheil Nasserri came out with four small squares to raise the piano bench, a question from an audience member about the risers led to an interesting disquisition by the pianist on his little squares. Nasserri has two sets and has to make them light so they don't count as extra baggage weight when he travels.

In the first of her two appearances Wednesday, Rachel Kolly d'Alba performed Guillaume Lekeu's Violin Sonata with pianist Winston Choi. The magenta-haired Swiss violinist—hiply clad in black jeans and sleeveless t-shirt—certainly gave it her all.

Pianist James Rhodes was meant to be a short addition to the afternoon, but Lepauw had difficulty getting the loquacious British pianist off stage. A media celebrity in his native England, Rhodes is being heavily promoted as a kind of musically gifted savant who taught himself piano, a less deranged version of David Helfgott. (Rhodes said he quit playing for ten years due to his parents' lack of support for a music career.)

Kudos to Lepauw for paying homage to the centennial of John Cage, which has so far gone somewhat under observed in Chicago. Singer [Julia Bentley] was a triple threat in Cage's *Four Dances* as vocalist, percussionist and pianist, aiding Kuang Hao-Huang by playing the strings of the prepared instrument. (The musicians rehearsing audibly next door added yet another aleatoric layer.)

Charles Rosen cancelled his evening recital due to illness, and the slot was filled instead by Beethoven's Clarinet Trio. Cellist Christopher Ferrer's intonation was not always airtight, but Lepauw and clarinetist Cory Tiffin were wholly inside the music, with Tiffin especially inspired in a rapt slow moment and with buoyant playing throughout. After a dinner break, violinist d'Alba (now changed into formal concert gown) returned for nothing less than Eugene Ysaie's complete Sonatas for solo violin. These almost comically difficult works are a virtual compendium of technical landmines and ludicrous complexities. Performing one or two would be impressive but tackling all six back to back in a live performance is truly an astounding feat, not least in a warm and humid venue. The perspiration made for some brief slips in the final sonatas, but for the most part d'Alba sailed through the myriad challenges with remarkable fire, intensity and fiddle technique to burn.

Wednesday's marathon closed with Lepauw and cellist Tétreault. Shostakovich's Cello Sonata is night music if there ever was, and received the most combustible performance of the evening with remarkable powerful playing from both men. An arrangement of the Adagio from Prokofiev's *Cinderella* ballet was supposed to close the evening and would have served as a fine coda. But Lepauw asked the visibly spent Tétreault to encore the Bach Cello Suite he had played eight hours earlier—not a movement, but the entire suite. To his credit, the gracious young Canadian did not poke Lepauw in the eye with his bow but performed the Bach once again, with burnished tone and even deeper feeling than earlier in the day. It was approaching midnight but the evening was not yet over. Lepauw and Tétreault came back out for a glowing arrangement of Massenet's *Meditation* and an elegant rendering of Saint-Saens' *The Swan*. Following some more Q&A and history about Tétreault's instrument, Lepauw called it a wrap at a quarter to one.

The Beethoven Festival really is worth checking out, and day passes allow the curious to stay as long as they like for as many performances as they can handle. The quality is high and the programming daring and eclectic. Do try to catch some of the ongoing events."

John von Rhein, Chicago Tribune

"Beethoven Fest 2 was wildly ambitious, overprogrammed, uneven but full of wonderful discoveries, including major artists Chicago deserved to hear, such as clarinetist Julian Bliss, violinist Rachel Kolly d'Alba and pianist HJ Lim. I can't wait for next year's edition."

Colleen Connelly, Streetwise

"According to Greek myth, humanity was born out of rebellion. Believers and scholars know this from books, and artists seem to know it inherently. Ludwig van Beethoven knew it in his day, and George Lepauw, creator of Chicago's own Beethoven Fest, knows it now.

With the theme of "Revolution 2012," the second annual Beethoven Fest (September 8-16) will rebel against expectations and celebrate art for art's sake, with music from all genres, an art exhibit, a multimedia presentation and a Beethoven ballet called *The Creatures of Prometheus*. The theme of the festival was inspired by the Greek myth of Prometheus, as well as the revolutions in both Beethoven's and Lepauw's worlds. "Both Beethoven and Prometheus are spiritually free, and they are spiritually free in order to become the best possible creators," Lepauw said. "And the creation, whether you're Prometheus creating humanity or Beethoven creating beautiful music, is an artistic process."

Diehard Beethoven fans will get their fill of the German composer's music, but they'll also be treated to jazz, pop, rock and blues music, proving you don't have to be a classical musician or scholar to enjoy this festival. It's the spirit of Beethoven – and his radical genius – that matters the most.

"We're focusing more on the experience," Lepauw said. "We want the experience to be great, just as if they were coming to my home for a party, and they'd meet a lot of interesting people and hear a lot of interesting music at my party."

The festival is only in its second year, but its vision and line-up boast of years of experience. Perhaps this is because in a way, it has been several years in the making. Lepauw, a Paris-born musician, began playing the piano at 3 years old. By the time he was 9, he was playing Beethoven pieces at recitals. The only time he wasn't playing the piano or studying the famous composer was when he took time off to study English and history at Georgetown University. If anyone understands Beethoven,

it's Lepauw.

Unfortunately, we aren't all Beethoven experts and classical music connoisseurs. But part of this year's festival is about encouraging the discovery of classical music. Whether it's their first exposure or their hundredth, everyone who attends will have a part in this musical revolution.

"People don't associate classical music experiences with something very relaxed and social and almost like a party," Lepauw said. "And I think we're making it so incredibly social and changing the whole environment around classical music that people find they are being changed by their experience, which, therefore, is a revolution as well."

In other words, Lepauw doesn't want people to be scared away by the lofty image of Beethoven and his music. Lepauw believes if Beethoven were around today, he might be a rock musician, a pop icon, or even an indie artist, something most of us can relate to. In the end, it's all about the art. Prometheus gave it to humanity. Beethoven created his own. And Lepauw is sharing it with all of us.

"Art is art," Lepauw said. "It doesn't matter if you're creating art as a classical musician or if you're creating art as a Lady Gaga type or if you're creating art as a visual artist and a filmmaker. It's all the same goal. We're trying to create something interesting. We're trying to touch people."

Alan Artner, Chicago Tribune

"Midway through "Beethoven Festival: Revolution 2012," the nine-day celebration at the National Pastime Theater in Uptown, programming showed unusual imagination and freshness of delivery.

The first came from a well-balanced mixture of old and new; the second, from a sense of involvement audiences perceived as affection. During about eight hours on Tuesday and Wednesday, nearly everything lived-with or sight-read had an enthusiasm that carried listeners past half-baked or overdone interpretation. Time and again you got the feeling that instead of high gloss here was a spirit of exploration that any live performance is fortunate to convey."

Lawrence A. Johnson, Chicago Classical Review

"The Beethoven Festival closed Sunday with all due revolutionary fervor, offering the *Eroica* Symphony and a Chicago premiere. There's not much of Beethoven's oeuvre that has not been heard at some point in Chicago. Sunday afternoon's closing event gave us the complete *Creatures of Prometheus*, in what festival director George Lepauw claims is the ballet's belated Chicago premiere, 211 years after the first performance in Vienna. As with the opening concert, the final event took place in the main first-floor Great Hall of the former People's Church in Uptown, drawing what appeared to be the largest crowd of the nine-day festival.

The symphony would have made a fine closer, but programming excess and "just one more thing" is part of the Beethoven Festival's charm. The *Choral Fantasy* is not one of Beethoven's more timeless works, but Lepauw brought a nice extempore spontaneity to the long opening piano cadenza and received fine support from Josephine Lee leading the orchestra, Chicago Children's Choir and seven young vocal soloists, including two current members of the ensemble.

After 60 events in nine days, what will Lepauw and company do for an encore next year? I'll be there to find out."

Austin Wulliman, Spektral Quartet Blog

"We members of the Spektral Quartet couldn't be more proud to have been a part of the second annual Beethoven Festival in Chicago just two short weeks ago. The sheer energy, enthusiasm and blind disregard for the easy way out in the name of art was infectious. George Lepauw has started something truly remarkable that seems to be taking on a life of its own."

EXTRA WEB-ONLY:

GEORGE LEPAUW IN CONVERSATION WITH ANDREW PATNER ON WFMT RADIO 98.7 CHICAGO

<http://blogs.wfmt.com/andrewpatner/2012/09/03/george-lepauw-on-beethoven-festival-revolution-2012/>