

Albright Makes 'Beautiful Music' for Hometown Crowd

Performance: World-Renowned Pianist Takes Corbet Theatre Stage



Jesse Smith / For The Chronicle

Charlie Albright Performs in Centralia

Charlie Albright opens up his performance with Beethoven Sonata No. 14 Saturday evening at Centralia College's Corbet Theatre.

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It had been four years since locally raised and world-renowned pianist Charlie Albright has performed in his hometown of Centralia.

After performing in Helsinki, Finland, just two weeks before, Albright returned to Corbet Theatre on Saturday night, where both his nine-foot Model D Steinway grand piano and 475 audience members awaited the virtuoso's performance.

The 23-year-old Albright's homecoming concert — with all proceeds dedicated to the Charlie Albright Scholarship fund and the maintenance of the grand piano that bears his name — did not disappoint.

Albright set the tone early, telling the audience that a relaxed mood was more fitting, joking jubilantly to the delight of the crowd in the process.

"It's great because you can really go for what the music is," Albright said about the laid back mood. "You don't have the worry of people saying 'that's not the right way.' You can really get to what I believe the core of the music is. It's really freeing."

He then went straight to work, opening with a rendition of Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata," with a video feed depicting a bird's eye view of Albright's hands doing what they do best.

Albright then followed up with a raw improvised piece, showing off his versatility with both technically-sound sections and fast-paced play.

"The first thing I think of is what I want to say with a piece," Albright told the audience about his improvisation process. "I start off slow and build on it from there. Improvisation is really a lost art, but it's starting to make a comeback for the better."

Albright's performance attracted friends, family and music lovers alike. Friends Jeri Moore — from Centralia — and Jessie Hoffman, a Chehalis resident, are a part of the latter. Moore and Hoffman, who became blind midway through her life, try to plan events that they can both equally enjoy.

Hoffman shared her experience of the show from her perspective.

"It's absolutely amazing," Hoffman said. "The way I'm experiencing this, I can't really put it into words. He's so talented and the music he makes is beautiful."

Centralia College President Robert Frost was also in attendance, providing the introduction for Albright.

"I was completely blown away," Frost said following the performance. "I expected a master and I really saw a genius. My wife is a musician herself and I could see her eyebrows go up every now and then. I could tell she was impressed and I think the crowd was right there with us."

After a brief intermission, Albright continued with other notable pieces, such as Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition," a massive piece divided into numerous sections that depicted Mussorgsky's trip through an art exhibit and the feelings evoked from viewing each painting.

Toward the end of the concert, Albright exercised his freedom of not being in a criticized element, switching styles and bursting out with his own version of Jerry Lee Lewis' "Great Balls of Fire" to the ovation of his listeners.

For an encore, Albright closed out the show with another improvisation, this time basing it off of just four notes of the audience's choosing.

The concert raised over \$14,000, with half dedicated to repairs and maintenance of the Charlie Albright Piano and the other half going directly toward the scholarship fund. Albright, a Centralia College graduate himself, thoroughly enjoyed giving back to the school and community that raised him.

"It's a great feeling," Albright said. "My mom has worked here since I was a little kid and I went here, too. It's a great thing to give back and support not only the instrument in the hall, but also the students that are coming through that need financial aid and scholarships. I needed the same and it's good to be able to kind of give back what I've received."

Albright doesn't have much time to stay and enjoy his homecoming. After a few more performances on the West Coast, including a performance at the Seattle Art Museum on Feb. 23, he will set out for London — his second time in Europe in two months — at the end of March to record with the renowned BBC Concert Orchestra, immediately followed by a tour in the United States with them that spans the East Coast.

Despite all of his high-profile performances that have spanned the globe, Albright still contends that the hometown crowd is the best.

"It's awesome," Albright said. "It's the best audience, right? You've grown up with so many family and friends, to see them all and perform for them is absolutely amazing."

Charlie Albright and his 2015 concert season can be followed online at www.charliealbright.com.