

# The Arizona Daily Star

Serving Tucson and Southern Arizona  
© 1999 Final Edition, Tucson, Tuesday, January 19

## Liszt sonata no match for pianist Nauman

By Ken Keuffel Jr.  
The Arizona Daily Star

Imagine running a mini-marathon one moment, then scaling Mount Everest the next.

In musical terms, that's what pianist John Nauman attempted at last night's guest artist recital in the University of Arizona's Crowder Hall. That he accomplished this feat so convincingly is a credit to stunning musicianship – and limitless stamina.

Perhaps, this stamina has its roots in swimming, something the pianist reportedly had to give up for music. Or maybe, it's a reflection of the kind of youthfulness that knows no fear.

In any case, the mini-marathon consisted of three Chopin pieces: the Barcarolle, the F-Minor Fantasy and the E-Major Scherzo. Mount Everest – and the last programmed piece – was Liszt's B-Minor Sonata; it's a 30-minute one-movement work of such breadth and difficulty that many pianists wisely avoid public performances of it altogether.

Along the way, relative, sweetly performed respites took the form of Liszt's transcription of Wagner's "Liebestod" and a Sgambati transcription of a Gluck melody.

Ironically, for a work so well-received

---

### REVIEW

---

**John Nauman, piano, performed a recital last night at Crowder Hall. The public may attend his master class today at 11 a.m. in Crowder.**

---

last night, Liszt's sonata had a rocky beginning at the time of its composition – not with clueless critics but with composers.

Schumann, to whom it was dedicated, despised it. And Brahms nodded off when the composer performed it for him.

Over time, however, others, notably Wagner, helped lend the work the respect it deserves. It's a revolution: The composer superimposes four sections on the traditional framework of a sonata-allegro form, transforming various opening motifs into all kinds of permutations.

Nauman is the grand prize winner of the American Music Scholarship Association Competition. Last night, he enhanced the sonata's stature, drawing on dazzling technique, a sense of the dramatic and a profound feel of the music's overall plan.

In some instances, that meant lingering over a passage just a little longer to bring out its expressiveness. Or slowing down long enough to clarify a transition from one section to another. Or disrupting the calm of more lyrical sections with latent, almost threatening rumbles of repetitive figures in the piano's bass.

The fugato emerged as a textbook example of linear clarity. And octave-rich sections scored with muscularity and verve.

Similar qualities characterized Nauman's Chopin. All three pieces make use of lolling ostinato-like rhythms, only to branch out into dense and constantly shifting terrain.

Nauman always guided the listener through the complexity by emphasizing the most important parts of the musical narrative. Rubato was exquisite. Keyboard-length passages of lightning speed came off effortlessly, with little more than a flick of the wrist.

Credit Gary Cook, director of the UA's music school, and the school's supporters for last night's recital. Reportedly, they arranged for Nauman to perform here after he played privately for them in New York City last spring.

Opportunity knocked, and they seized it.