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Gershwin Piano Quartet

**Mischa Cheung // André Desponds
Benjamin Engeli // Stefan Wirth**

sheds new light on the music of George Gershwin. It features 4 pianists on 4 grand pianos, playing, arranging and improvising on some of Gershwin's most popular songs and orchestral works, such as „Rhapsody in Blue“, „An American in Paris“, and „I Got Rhythm“.The originals are rescored for the unfamiliar combination of 4 pianos by the members of the quartet themselves and make for a novel and exciting listening and viewing experience.

The Gershwin Piano Quartet was founded by André Desponds in 1996 and has presented its program in Europe, South America, China and the Middle East with great success and to broad critical acclaim. Some of the places where the Quartet has performed include the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival (Germany), the KKL Lucerne (Switzerland), the Festival de Menton (France), the Athens International Festival (Greece), the Baalbek International Festival (Lebanon), the Oriental Art Center Shanghai (China) and the Sala São Paulo (Brazil).

In its new program, the quartet does not limit itself solely to the music of Gershwin but also includes important works by some of Gershwin's contemporaries, namely Igor Stravinsky's „Petrouchka“ and Maurice Ravel's „La Valse“. In this way, the many cross- references between the old world and the new, between classical music and jazz, classical ballet and Broadway theater, become apparent, thus creating a lively and highly virtuosic concert evening.

André Desponds (b. 1958) is one of the few pianists who feel equally at home in a Bach fugue, a Chopin Ballade and Gershwin's „I Got Rhythm“.At the early age of 16 he was admitted to the class of Sava Savoff at the Musikhochschule Zürich and has since been awarded numerous prizes in national and international competitions.André Desponds has performed in many international venues, including the Gasteig, Munich, the St. Petersburg Philharmony and the UN Headquarters in New York. He has made recordings for Swiss television and radio as well as a number of CD- productions and collaborates regularly with many noted artists, such as Noëmi Nadelmann,Thomas Dobler, Simon Estes,Andreas Vollenweider and Bettina Boller. In addition,André Desponds has developed a



wide spectrum of musical activities as a jazz improviser, silent film accompanist and as a composer for theatre and film.

Some of his projects have included the founding of the Gershwin Piano Quartet (1996), the theatrical project „L’homme orchestre“ with the Clown Dimitri at the Lucerne Festival as well as numerous educational orchestra presentations. In 2006, together with the dancer Andrea Herdeg, he created „Zal“, a play based on the life and music of F. Chopin that combines elements of music, dance and theatre. Desponds is a professor for improvisation and chamber music at the Hochschule der Künste Zürich.



Stefan Wirth (b. 1975) is one of the most versatile Swiss musicians of his generation. As a soloist he has performed with the Czech Chamber Orchestra, the Bernese Chamber Orchestra and the Malaysian National Philharmonic Orchestra amongst others. He is especially dedicated to contemporary music, both as a composer and as a performer with the Collegium Novum, Zurich and the Ensemble Contrechamps, Geneva. Finally, he has also worked in theatre with directors such as Christoph Marthaler and Frank Castorf as composer, arranger and performer.

Stefan Wirth received his training as a pianist at the Konservatorium Zurich with Hadassa Schwimmer and Irwin Gage. He pursued his studies in the USA at the New England Conservatory, Boston and at Indiana University Bloomington, where he studied with Leonard Hokanson and received his Master’s Degree in 2001. He has won numerous prizes: at the Swiss National Youth Competition, from the American Society of Arts and Letters, or, together with the violinist Jakub Dzialak at the International Chamber Music Competition Thessaloniki. Additionally, he has participated in masterclasses with Homero Francesch and Bruno Leonardo Gelber.

Mischa Cheung (b. 1984) is the youngest member of the Quartet. Of Swiss-Chinese parentage, he started playing the piano at the age of 3 and received his early training from his father. Since graduating from high school he has been studying at the Zürcher Hochschule der Künste with the renowned pianist Konstantin Scherbakov, where he received his "Master of Arts in Music Performance" in 2009 with distinction as well as a "Master of Arts in Specialized Music Performance" in 2011. Since 2009, he has been appointed assistant to Scherbakov.



Mischa Cheung has won numerous prizes: 1st prize at the piano competition of the Basel Musikakademie, 1st prize with special distinction at the Swiss National Youth Competition, 2nd prize at the Concours Géraldine Whitaker, soloist- and special audience prize at the Schenk- Competition 2010, 1st prize at the Kiwanis-Competition 2011, 3rd prize at the 2012 Prokofiev Competition of the IBLA Foundation New York, 1st prize at the Allround Piano Competition 2013 Zurich. He has also received many scholarships and sponsorship awards

from prestigious foundations such as the LYRA Foundation and the Fritz Gerber Foundation.

Mischa Cheung has appeared as a soloist with various orchestras including the Junge Münchner Philharmonie and the Collegium Musicum Basel, and he has performed in many countries of Europe as well as in Asia and South America. Since the end of 2011, he is the pianist of Spark, the classical band (awarded with the ECHO Klassik 2011).



Benjami Engeli (b. 1978) comes from a musical family and developed an early interest in a great number of instruments. He didn't begin regular piano lessons until the age of 15, studying with Adrian Oetiker up to his graduation from the Musikakademie Basel. At the same time he also studied horn at the Musikhochschule Lucerne. In 2000 he enrolled at the Musikhochschule Zürich with Homero Francesch and graduated with a soloist's diploma in 2003. Additionally, he has taken lessons with Lazar Berman, Andrzej Jasinski, Maurizi Pollini, Menahem Pressler and Andràs Schiff. As a prize winner of numerous

competitions Benjamin Engeli has performed in most European countries as well as in India, North and South America. He has also appeared at festivals in Chicago, Davos, Gstaad, Ludwigsburg, Lucerne etc. and has performed at prestigious venues such as the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, the Wigmore Hall (London), the Tschaikovsky Conservatory (Moskow), the Herkulessaal Munich and the Konzerthaus Wien.

Many of his performances have been broadcast on radio and in 2010 Solo Musica released a CD with piano sonatas by Ludwig van Beethoven, which met great critical acclaim. As a member of the Tecchler Trio he won first prize at the International ARD- Competition in Munich in 2007. Today he is active in several free formations, is much in demand as vocal accompanist and holds a teaching position for chamber music at the Hochschule für Musik in Basel.

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