

AWADAGIN PRATT

Among his generation of concert artists, pianist Awadagin Pratt is acclaimed for his musical insight and intensely involving performances that receive tremendous audience response and press attention throughout the United States.

Born in Pittsburgh, Awadagin Pratt began studying piano at the age of six. Three years later, having moved to Normal, Illinois with his family, he also began studying violin. At the age of 16, he entered the University of Illinois where he studied piano, violin, and conducting. He subsequently enrolled at the Peabody Conservatory of Music where he became the first student in the school's history to receive diplomas in three performance areas - piano, violin and conducting.

In 1992 Mr. Pratt won the Naumburg International Piano Competition and two years later was awarded a 1994 Avery Fisher Career Grant. He has played numerous recitals throughout the U.S. including performances in New York at Lincoln Center, Washington, D.C. at the Kennedy Center, Los Angeles at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion and Chicago at Orchestra Hall. His many orchestral performances include appearances with the New York Philharmonic, Orchestra of St. Luke's, Minnesota Orchestra and the Pittsburgh, St. Louis, National, Detroit and New Jersey symphonies. Major summer festival engagements include Ravinia, Blossom, Wolftrap, Caramoor and Aspen, the Hollywood Bowl and the Mostly Mozart Festival in Tokyo. Mr. Pratt is also the Artistic Director of the Next Generation Festival, a two-week chamber music festival in Lancaster, PA., tours with the Dedalus String Quartet and appears with cellist Zuill Bailey in duo recitals throughout the US.

Recent and upcoming appearances include recital engagements at the Kennedy Center and National Gallery in Washington, D.C., the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark and in La Jolla and Savannah, as well as return appearances with the orchestras of Atlanta, Baltimore, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Seattle, Colorado, Kansas City, Utah, Nashville and San Antonio.

As a conductor, Mr. Pratt has participated in American Symphony Orchestra League and Conductor's Guild workshops as well as in the National Conducting Institute, where he worked closely with Leonard Slatkin and conducted the National Symphony at the Kennedy Center. He has also conducted the Toledo, New Mexico, Winston-Salem, Santa Fe and Prince George County symphonies, the Concertante di Chicago and two orchestras in Japan.

A great favorite on college and university performing arts series and a strong advocate of music education, Awadagin Pratt participates in numerous residency and outreach activities wherever he appears; these activities may include master classes, children's recitals, play/talk demonstrations and question/answer sessions for students of all ages.

Internationally, Mr. Pratt has toured Japan four times and performed in Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Poland, Israel and South Africa.

Awadagin Pratt has been the subject of numerous articles in the national press, including Newsweek, People Magazine, USA Weekend, New York Newsday, Emerge and Mirabella. He was named one of the 50 Leaders of Tomorrow in Ebony Magazine's

special 50th anniversary issue and has been featured on National Public Radio's Performance Today, St. Paul Sunday Morning and Weekend Edition. On television, Mr. Pratt has performed on the Today Show, Good Morning America, and Sesame Street, been profiled on CBS Sunday Morning and was one of the featured soloists on PBS's "Live from the Kennedy Center - A Salute to Slava." He also performed twice at the White House at the invitation of President and Mrs. Clinton.

In September, 1993 Mr. Pratt signed an exclusive recording contract with Angel/EMI. His debut album, *A Long Way From Normal*, was released in 1994. Subsequent recital discs include an all Beethoven Sonata CD, *Live from South Africa* and *Transformations*. His most recent Angel/EMI recording is an all Bach disc with the St. Lawrence String Quartet.

Mr. Pratt is currently an Associate Professor of Piano and Artist in Residence at the College Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati.

BEN HONG, current Assistant Principal Cellist of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, joined the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 1993, at age 24, making him the youngest member of the orchestra at that time. Born in Taipei, Taiwan, Ben won his native country's National Cello Competition three years in a row before leaving home, at 13, for the Juilliard School. Later he studied with Lynn Harrell at the University of Southern California School of Music before joining the LA PHIL.

In addition to performing with the LA PHIL, he also performs frequently as soloist and as a member of chamber music ensembles. Ben has collaborated with such artists as Emanuel Ax, Yefim Bronfman, Lynn Harrell, Janine Jansen, Lang Lang, Cho-Liang Lin, Nicolai Lugansky, Bobby McFerrin, Christopher O'Riley, Shanghai String Quartet, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Kyoko Takezawa, Sir Simon Rattle, and Lars Vogt.

Ben's desire to grow musically has resulted in a number of diverse performance opportunities. In 2006, he performed a Bach Cello Suite with the local hip-hop orchestra, DaKah, at Walt Disney Concert Hall as part of the annual Grand Avenue Festival. That performance inspired a passion for improvisation, which he continues to develop with violinist/singer Lili Haydn. His improvisation with Lili was spotlighted by Alex Ross in a 2007 article in the *New Yorker Magazine* focusing on the LA PHIL.

In May of 2007 on the Philharmonic's Green Umbrella series, Ben performed the Philharmonic premiere of Sofia Gubaidulina's *In Croce*. Alan Rich from the *LA Weekly* described it as "an amazing work for cello (the Philharmonic's Ben Hong) and organ (Mark Robson), ecstatic and ecstatically played: hypnotic, intense, an unceasing 19-minute mantra." And in August of 2007, Ben performed with the legendary Iranian classical singer, Shahram Nazeri, to a sold-out audience at Walt Disney Concert Hall. Don Heckman, jazz and world music critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, said, "The opening "OM" segment, for example, featuring the brilliant playing of cellist Ben Hong, moved from a meditative beginning into a Western-like cadenza, subtly combining qualities of East and West."

This summer at the Hollywood Bowl, Ben will be the featured soloist with the LA PHIL in Tan Dun's *Crouching Tiger* Concerto.

Most recently, Ben was hired by Dreamworks to train several members of the cast of the upcoming movie, "The Soloist", including Jamie Foxx and Tom Hollander. He also serves as an on-set technical advisor. The movie is based on Steve Lopez's columns in the Los Angeles Times about Nathaniel Anthony Ayers, a former Juilliard student who ended up on the streets of Los Angeles homeless and schizophrenic yet held tight to his music. Ben's playing will be featured on the film's soundtrack.

Other interests include working on and riding his three sports motorcycles, bicycling, scuba diving, martial arts, and West African drumming. 4/08