



# NEW CLASSICAL TRACKS: JOEL FAN

BY JULIE AMACHER, MINNESOTA PUBLIC RADIO  
AUGUST 22, 2006



St. Paul, Minn. — Have you wanted to travel the globe? No time? No money?? Well, here's one affordable, worry-free way to do it: listen to this new CD.

On “World Keys,” pianist Joel Fan circumnavigates the musical earth. It's a one-hour recital that features several world premieres. Mr. Fan studied at the Juilliard School, Harvard University and the Peabody Conservatory. As a member of Yo-Yo Ma's eclectic Silk Road Ensemble, he's quite comfortable maneuvering through various musical worlds. Seven of the 13 pieces on this recording are world premieres that explore music from Asia, Europe and Australia.

Joel Fan launches into “World Keys” with a short sketch based on a theme from one of Turkey's leading composers, A. Adnan Saygun. It's an inspired choice to begin the CD, with Fan playing off the bouncing, distinctive Turkish rhythms.

After that short stop in Turkey, Fan rolls into Russia, represented by Sergei Prokofiev and his Sonata No. 3 in A minor. Prokofiev completed this work in 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution. It's subtitled “From the Old Notebooks” because he based this work on material he had written as a student ten years earlier. It matches the driving mood of the Turkish piece before it. Fan plays with so much fervor that the piano blazes with Prokofiev's fiery, bold chords. The score calls for the execution of powerful, daring rhythms as well as subtle, peaceful melodies. Fan has the technical skill and the emotional capacity to handle it.

The more I listen to this new release, the more I find myself returning to Syria to hear the track featuring composer Dia Succari, whose music has a meditative quality that's mesmerizing, yet somewhat unsettling. Succari is one of six living composers represented on “World Keys.” He gathers inspiration from the native rhythms and the folk music of his Syrian homeland. “La Nuit du Destin” (The Night of Destiny) refers to a night of prayer and spiritual enlightenment. The shape of the main theme shifts as Fan improvises and repeats it, creating a hypnotic cycle.

A little deeper into this new recording, we get a taste of Hungary via Italy with Franz Liszt's Concert Paraphrase of Verdi's “Rigoletto.” Liszt often composed piano transcriptions of symphonic and operatic masterpieces to add sparkle to his showy performances. Here, he takes the vocal quartet (“Bella figlia dell'amore”) from Act II of “Rigoletto.” We hear the Duke seducing Maddelena as the melody comes singing through in the left hand, while the contrasting right hand describes the breathlessness of the moment with an alluring cascade of romantic piano runs. Fan captures the lush, flirtatious scene with great flair.

There are many more ports of call on “World Keys.” Thanks to his careful, in-depth research, Fan provides interesting program notes with detailed information about each piece and its relationship to the composer's homeland. As you navigate through this recording, you'll be more than a tourist. Joel Fan takes you inside the music on “World Keys,” offering a deeper, more rewarding experience that may inspire you to travel beyond the border more often.