

SOCIETY & CULTURE

music



# High NOTE

TheatreWorks Silicon Valley presents  
*Hershey Felder: A Paris Love Story.*

By Misty Milioto

PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER ASH

PIANO VIRTUOSO HERSHEY FELDER, who began playing just before his ninth birthday, says that making sound come through the instrument is a “magical” experience. Yet he does more than make sound these days, wringing emotion from the piano while portraying legendary composers and bringing them to life onstage. It’s all part of his celebrated *Great Composer Series*, which began in 2000 and features the works of popular composers such as Leonard Bernstein, George Gershwin and Irving Berlin, as well as classical composers such as Frédéric Chopin, Ludwig van Beethoven and Pyotr Tchaikovsky. He brings the latest in that series, *Hershey Felder: A Paris Love Story*, to the Bay Area’s TheatreWorks for a monthlong run that begins with a world premiere at the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts April 3. Written and performed by Felder, and directed by Trevor Hay, the performance explores the life and music of impressionist composer Claude Debussy.

What makes Felder’s show so unique? The way he adopts the persona of the composer, complete with costumes, lavish sets and intricate lighting. In addition to playing the piano, Felder also includes singing and monologue in a way that fully transports audiences to another time in history.

Debussy, Felder notes, viewed nature as his religion, and some of his most famous works include “La mer” (The Sea), “Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune” (Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun) and “Clair de lune” (Light of the Moon). “I invest 1,000 percent in my characters,” Felder says. “My team dives deep into researching the composer’s life, learning what he did, how he spoke, what his mannerisms might have been, unearthing any little-known facts, locating correspondence—anything we can use to paint a complete picture.”

The series began after friend and producer Greg Willenborg suggested Felder create a play about Gershwin. At the time, Felder had been working as a pianist and had some prior experience with acting. He spent the next five years researching what would later become *George Gershwin Alone*, which ran for 12 weeks on Broadway, followed by other successful runs across the country. This latest performance has a bonus: It’s the first piece in which the pianist, a native of Canada, will reveal his personal connection to the City of Light—and to Debussy’s works.

“I’ve always joked that audiences seeing my shows have no idea what I really sound like,” Felder notes. “I guess now they will find out.” *Through May 5, \$40-\$120, 500 Castro St., Mountain View, 650.463.1960, theatreworks.org*