

Album Review: *Beethoven Blues*

Note Perfect Performance vs Spontaneous Composition

(by George Edwards)

What if Beethoven were alive today? What if he were composing now? Would contemporary culture and music influence him? Would he listen to pop or country music? What about jazz, blues, R&B, gospel, hip-hop, or funk? One person has put forth an answer to these questions with a recently released album titled *Beethoven Blues*.

The artist is Jon Batiste, who is a 38-year-old multi-instrumentalist, bandleader, Grammy and Academy Award winner. Growing up in Metairie, Louisiana, he studied classical piano while playing gigs in New Orleans nightclubs. He went on to earn bachelor's and master's degrees at Juilliard.

The album includes original compositions by Batiste that were inspired by Beethoven as well as variations on some of Beethoven's most popular melodies. Like John Lewis of the Modern Jazz Quartet with Bach and Duke Ellington with Tchaikovsky and Grieg, Batiste creates a refreshing fusion of classical and jazz. However, one can also clearly hear blues, gospel, and funk influences in his interpretations. While some might lament his improvisation on classical compositions, the fact is that he breathes new, refreshing, and exciting life into beloved standards.

In an interview in the *New York Times* with their classical music reporter Javier Hernandez from November 19, 2024, Batiste says that there is a reverence in classical music that is stifling in that it limits opportunities for creative transformation. He says that while classical music allows things to be written down, "it's also allowed for people to hold onto the score in lieu of the mystery of the music." He goes on to point out, "Sometimes, we revere music because it's great, but also because it's European. And some things we are reluctant to revere because of the communities that it comes from and the places it is meant to be played..."

For a fresh, respectful, and novel interpretation of one of our favorite composers, you can listen to Batiste's *Beethoven Blues* on either YouTube or Spotify. Or if you're old-fashioned like me and want something tangible for listening, drop by Waterloo Records and buy the CD. In any case, you'll enjoy some old favorites with surprising and delightful variations at every turn.



AUSTIN MUSIC CLUB

PROGRAM

January 15, 2025

Program Leader: **Katharine Shields**

Song Leader: **Liz Cass** Accompanist: **Cynthia Mills**

Song: "Seek Not Afar for Beauty" UUA 77

Hold On by Margaret Bonds (1913 -1972)

Standing' in the Need of Prayer and *Sit Down Sister* from "Songs of the Spirit" by Gwyneth Walker (1947-)

Performed by **Elise Ragland**, soprano, and **Angelica Lopez**, pianist

Soul Journey by Melanie Richards (1946 –)

Performed by **Melanie Richards**, pianist

Il Danses from "Medailles Antiques" by Philippe Gaubert (1879-1941)

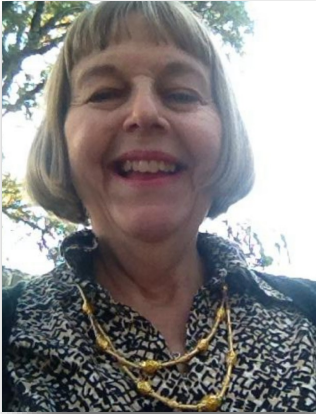
Performed by **Pat Yingst**, flutist, **Bowie Lin**, guest violinist, and **Ely Guest**, guest pianist

The Irish Washerwoman Traditional

Swallowtail Jig Traditional

Moderato from "Duet No. 4 for Two Violins in B-flat Major" by Johann Christian Bach (1735-1782)

Performed by **Ruby Jane Smith**, violinist and fiddle 1, and **Gregory Shields**, violist and fiddle 2



President's Musings

Elisabeth Moreno

Begin it now . . .

With January being the traditional month of resolutions, this imperative “Begin it now” (often attributed to Johann Wolfgang Goethe) came to mind recently.

Actually it is part of a larger quotation which manages to fold commitment, action and genius all into the same dynamic mix: *Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back—concerning all acts of initiative (and creation) there is one elementary truth that ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself then Providence moves too. Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now.**

Various versions of this quotation have made it onto many motivational posters. (I remember seeing it on the wall of my daughter’s dance studio, under a photo of some fabulously thin dancer executing a gravity-defying leap across the stage.) And sometimes I wonder if it wasn’t part of the inspiration behind the famous Nike swoosh and trademark: Just Do It.

But I have another reason for relating to this quotation and that is my former role as a writing instructor. Anyone who has given thought to the writing process knows that difficulty in BEGINNING is the primary reason people give for finding writing challenging. (And that’s probably why AI is now so popular in writing first drafts of just about everything.) It doesn’t matter that there is vast documentation from professional writers on exactly how they trick themselves into a productive start, students are always surprised when they are given permission to START ANYWHERE, not necessarily at the beginning. (Indeed professional writers usually write their beginnings LAST.) I don’t know if and how the “start anywhere, just start” advice plays out in musical composition but there are probably as many instances of composer’s block as there are writer’s block which attest to the problem.

To me, though, the real beauty of this quotation is the way it encourages you to ditch the nay-saying inner critic and recognize that just beginning has a momentum of its own. And in contrast to the way in which many New Year’s resolutions focus on changing negative behaviors (drinking, sitting on the couch, etc.) through the force of our own individual will, this quote draws in Providence as an ally. Now Providence is a term we probably haven’t used much since the Puritans, but it captures the same sense of happy collaboration that our more colloquial expressions, like “I’m on a roll” do. The point is, once we begin, we are not alone.

So let’s just **begin** something this year—even if it’s just for the exhilarating sense of the universe giving you a providential nudge. And once you get started, look around and see if things don’t start falling mysteriously into place.

Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now.

*For those of you curious about the origin of the entire quote, read on:

Flippo, Hyde. (2024, June 25). A Well Known Quote Attributed to Goethe May Not Actually Be His. Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/goethe-quote-may-not-be-his-4070881>

Poetry Corner

This poem is in the public domain.



My New Companion (by new AMC member Pam Mayes)

After 6 months with Beau
this kitten has destroyed one television,
two chairs, many toys and several sweaters.

I still repair scratches and bites
from joyful leaps and bounds
and spend many hours laughing at his antics,

like the day he proudly revealed himself
with his head in a baggie
that had contained the treat he consumed.

He still has nine lives after that
near miss as he snuggles
and purrs his way into my heart.

I hope that 2025 brings love and peace
to your purrrfection.

Just sayin...

I have a friend who writes music about sewing machines. He's a singer songwriter. Or sew it seams.

Music: The best way in life to run away for a while without having to go anywhere.

Someone once asked me: "Why do you love music so much?"

I replied: because it's the only thing that stays when everything and everyone is gone.

My therapist told me the way to achieve true inner peace is to finish what I start. So far I've finished two bags of M&Ms and a chocolate cake. I feel better already.

Insongnia—The inability to sleep after rehearsal due to either a favorite or annoyingly difficult section of music playing on repeat in your head.

Upcoming Events

Armstrong Community Music School <https://www.acmsaustin.org/special-events> Music and singing classes...plus events like Ukulele Family Jams and Ukulele Happy Hour (for ages 21+)

ATX Chamber Music and Jazz <https://atxmusic.com/> Bronfman and Bourbon - A solo recital with Yefim Bronfman: Friday, January 24th.

Arts On Alexander <https://www.artsonalexander.org/events> Holbrook Organ Series - Ben Kerswell: Friday, January 17th.

Austin Chamber Music Center <https://austinchambermusic.org/concert-season/> Fin de siecle - music composed around the turn of the centuries featuring the Carpe Diem String Quartet and Michelle Schumann: Friday, January 24th and Saturday, 25th.

Austin Civic Orchestra <https://austincivicorchestra.org/events/> Texas Rising Stars - featuring winners from the UT Butler School of Music String Concerto Competition: Saturday, February 1st.

Austin Classical Guitar <https://austinclassicalguitar.org/events/> Live at the Rosette - William Kanengiser, Grammy award winner and founding member of the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet: Saturday, February 1st and Sunday, 2nd.

Austin Opera <https://my.austinopera.org/> Verdi's Requiem - 150th anniversary of the premiere of Requiem with Chorus Austin (celebrating their 60th anniversary): Saturday, February 1st and Sunday, 2nd.

Austin Symphony <https://my.austinsymphony.org/events?view=list> New World: Friday, January 10th and Saturday, 11th.

Conspirare <https://www.conspirare.org/tickets/> Restless Hearts - music of comfort and hope: Saturday, January 25th.

KMFA <https://www.kmfa.org/events> Always a full calendar of community events.

La Follia <https://www.lafollia.org/upcoming-concerts> Mentors of Mozart, with Anton Nel: Friday, January 31st and Saturday, February 1st.

The Long Center <https://thelongcenter.org/upcoming-calendar/> The University of Texas Wind Ensemble: Triathlon and Circus Maximus. Saturday, January 25th. Plus a full calendar of events.

The Metropolitan Opera On stage: <https://www.metopera.org/season/2023-24-season/> On Demand: <https://www.metopera.org/season/on-demand/>

Salon Concerts <https://www.salonconcerts.org/> Chamber Series: Sunday, January 19th and Monday, 20th.

UT Butler School of Music <https://music.utexas.edu/events> !! MIRO Quartet: Friday, January 24th. Always a full calendar of wonderful music and most of it is FREE.

UT-Texas Performing Arts <https://texasperformingarts.org/events> !! Carrie Rodriguez, Oscar Casares & Joel Salcido: Friday, January 24th.

Zach Scott Theatre <https://zachtheatre.org/shows-events/> Jersey Boys - the songs of Frankie Valli & The Four Seasons. January 29th - March 2nd.

Sometimes events are left out because they are not posted on their websites in time to make our calendar. PLEASE let me know of any arts listings that you think should be included in our monthly calendar. Joy joygooden@austin.rr.com

The Met's 2024–25 season of live movie theater transmissions features eight extraordinary operas.

Check your local cinema for times.

Aida (GIUSEPPE VERDI) Saturday, January 25

Fidelio (LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN) Saturday, March 15

Le Nozze di Figaro (WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART)
Saturday, April 26

Salome (RICHARD STRAUSS) Saturday, May 17

Il Barbiere di Siviglia (GIOACHINO ROSSINI)
Saturday, May 31

Calling all Music Club singers!

A plot is afoot to re-establish an internal Music Club chorus. Our raison d'etre would be to entertain the rest of the club, as well as ourselves of course. No professional singing experience is required. Please contact Carol Brannon (catbrann@yandex.com) before Valentine's Day to put your name on the list of those interested, and we'll add a star and a free lunch if you would be willing to direct the effort.