

MUSIC REVIEW

Taking the spirit of 'Goldberg' too far?

By JOSEF WOODARD

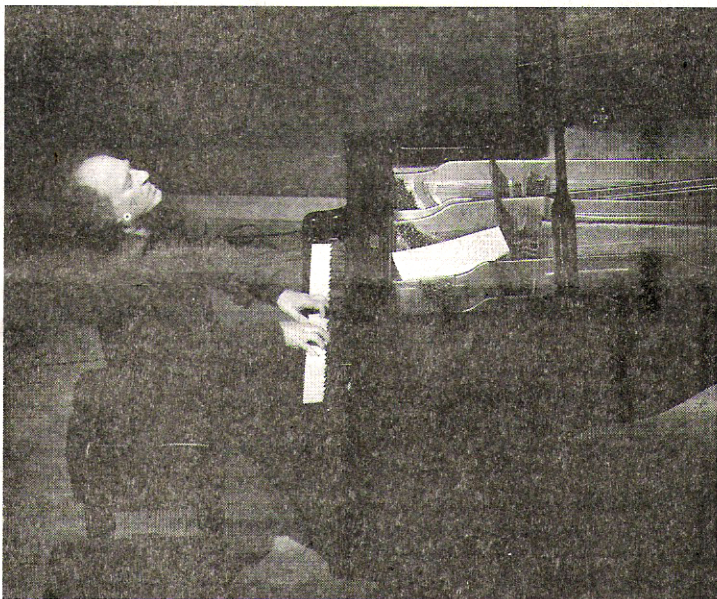
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At least a few cultural molds were broken when classical pianist-conductor Jeffrey Kahane faced off against maverick jazz pianist Uri Caine on Saturday night. Classical music generally eschews nightclub venues and double bills with jazz players, and rare is the jazz musician with the chops and chutzpah to take on and deconstruct major classical works, as Caine often has.

But all roads led, mostly happily, to the Jazz Bakery and the common ground of Bach's towering "Goldberg" Variations. Kahane played it straight, and pristinely, as he did at Royce Hall a few years back. Caine, joined by a six-piece group of fine East Coast and Los Angeles musicians, subjected the score to all manner of treatments.

Similar results were put forth in a controversial 2000 recording for the Winter & Winter label.

One strong link between the pianists is Caine's status as composer in residence with the Kahane-conducted Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, for which Caine has written a double piano



CHRISTINE COTTER *Los Angeles Times*

IN THE MOMENT: *Jeffrey Kahane, above, played "Goldberg" Variations straight in contrast to Uri Caine's maverick approach.*

concerto to be premiered in the spring.

In Caine's "Goldberg," however, passages of straight Bach are stirred into a giddy cocktail of gospel, funk, klezmer, swing, tango and movement titles such as "The Bushed Variation" (full of mashed-up, thematic quotations) and "Luther's Nightmare Variation."

At the Jazz Bakery, the evening's invitingly experimental atmosphere softened some rough edges, including the room's unflattering acoustics for Kahane's unamplified piano. This may not be an ideal chamber music setting, but the idea of hopping fences between stubbornly fixed traditions is a promising one.

Even so, amid Caine's irreverent thicket it seemed that the spirit of poor Bach had left the building — a queasy feeling only amplified by a performance of the real thing having come first.

Hearing the "Goldberg" Variations can be a religious experience, as was Kahane's caring, lucid version and the powerful interpretation by András Schiff in Walt Disney Concert Hall last year.

In Caine's deconstructionist hands, given his implicit sly grin and genre smorgasbord approach, the reading verges on the sacrilegious.

No doubt that's part of his nothing-is-sacred goal, but some music is too profound to mess with so casually.