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## **Cohen delights with intellect and a touch of his homeland**

By PAUL HORSLEY  
The Kansas City Star

Arnaldo Cohen knows how to make an audience receptive to his artistry even before he plays a single note.

At his recital Saturday at the Carlsen Center's intimate 400-seat theater, the Brazilian pianist walked out unassumingly, bowed briefly and sat down at the piano. He wore black trousers and a classy black shirt one might don to spend an evening with sophisticated friends.

No fuss, no tux. Trappings removed, as it were, so that one could get to the heart of the matter -- the music.

His playing matched his demeanor: It was unfussy, provocative, never flashy but always with an edginess that kept the mind engaged. It might be going to far to call it "brainy," but the emphasis certainly was architecture over color, poetry of gesture over beauty of sonority.

Yet there was a mirthfulness to this brilliant musician's intellect that made his recital unstintingly enjoyable. The first chord of Busoni's arrangement of the Bach Chaconne was jolting in its simplicity and directness, and the subsequent sojourn into early 20th century piano aesthetics was tasteful and bracingly straightforward. Cohen let Busoni do the interpreting of Bach rather than add to the excess.

The heart of his program was a set of pieces by eight Brazilian composers, music that Cohen has championed in a landmark disc for the BIS label, "Three Centuries of Brazilian Music."

With his signature restraint Cohen made a strong case for Alberto

Nepomuceno's sweetly sentimental Air from the Suite Antiga, Luis Levy's Valsa Lenta No. 4, Eduardo Dutra's Rachmaninoff-like Prelude in F-sharp minor and Henrique Oswald's dark "Il Neige." This was music on a level approaching -- or exceeding -- that of Brazil's beloved Villa-Lobos.

The program's second half was devoted entirely to Chopin's 24 Preludes, Op. 28. Again the emphasis was clarity over effusiveness, and the interpretation worked on its own terms despite some clunkiness of texture.

Some of the slower pieces were perhaps a bit *too* no-nonsense, like the E-minor Prelude. But there were indeed moments when a furious temperament came bursting forth, as in the B-flat minor. Subtle surprises kept the interest high throughout: the perversely long pause on the high B-flat at the end of the "Raindrop" Prelude, or the stately, ringing A flats at the end of Prelude 17, which were perfectly gauged for tempo and forcefulness.

The pianist's transcription of Strauss's "Die Fledermaus" Overture, the single encore, was played with a sparkling but never ostentatious virtuosity that was in keeping with "the Cohen touch."

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## MUSIC REVIEW

Pianist Arnaldo Cohen

- **Reviewed:** Saturday, January 10 at the Carlsen Center Theatre
- **Attendance:** 300 (approx.)