

# Interview: Pianist Lang Lang

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Lang Lang is a gifted artist who began playing piano at the age of three. Now in his 20s, the Chinese prodigy has performed around the world with many other talented musicians. Among them have been conductors Daniel Barenboim, Christoph Eschenbach, and Seiji Ozawa, and most recently jazz legend Herbie Hancock. In addition to traditional and live albums, Lang Lang has also contributed to movie scores by composer Tan Dun and the soundtrack to *Gran Turismo 5*.

Named by *The New York Times* as “the hottest artist on the classical music planet,” Lang Lang is also responsible for what *The Today Show* calls the “Lang Lang Effect” – since his performance in Beijing’s Opening Ceremony for the 2008 Olympic Summer Games, more than 40 million Chinese children have been inspired to learn to play classical piano. He has furthered his commitment to bringing the joy of classical music to children throughout the world with the Lang Lang International Music Foundation, and also serves in a number of other roles, including honorary professor, music and global ambassador, author, master teacher, and brand ambassador.



Visit his [website](#) where you can listen to Lang Lang play, see his videos, and interact with other fans from around the world.

Music Designer Janica Quach was able to visit with Lang briefly to talk about his latest live release, *Lang Lang: Live in Vienna*.

**Janica Quach:** *What process did you go through for choosing pieces particularly for this album; for this performance in Vienna?*

**Lang Lang:** For live recitals, I always try to pick a combination of composers and bring different periods of time together into one recital. But the focus of the first half, it was these great Beethoven sonatas. So, I had one early one (Sonata No. 3, Op. 2), and then one of the most played and most challenging ones, Appassionata. It’s actually my first time to record Beethoven sonatas. I never recorded Beethoven sonatas before; the only thing I did for Beethoven was a concerto, “No. 1” and “No. 4,” three years ago. So, for me this is a real challenge to do his sonatas. For the second half I wanted something very different, so I came up with the idea of recording my favorite Spanish music, Albéniz’ Iberia, and this is Book 1 out of four books. Those pieces are like fairy tales, because in Albéniz’ young years, he was actually on a boat a lot. So he went to many islands or many coastal cities in Spain and listened to different kinds of music and he memorized it and later he created this suite which combined the twelve different flavors of music. It is quite fascinating to hear those works, because they are not played as often as Beethoven’s sonatas or Chopin’s music. But I believe they are really beautiful works and real master work, so I love doing them, to share those pieces together with Beethoven and with Prokofiev later on this big War Sonata No. 7 and these three anchor pieces from Chopin since we are celebrating the two-hundred-year anniversary this year of Chopin.

**JQ:** *Everybody loves to hear Chopin!*

**LL:** Yeah, you never go wrong with Chopin!

**JQ:** *In 2008, over five billion people viewed your performance in Beijing’s opening ceremony for the 2008 Summer Olympics. Can you talk a little bit about that period.*

**LL:** Oh, wow, that almost feels like yesterday, even though two years has passed. Already, an old-time story. But still, it’s really, really overwhelming to perform there, and in the city that I kind of spent a lot of time of my childhood in. That was actually China’s first ever biggest event, the opening ceremony, so I was quite honored for me to be a part of it, and also to play with little kids next to me. That was pretty cute; I had two jobs, playing and babysitting (laughing).

**JQ:** *(laughing) You did it beautifully!*

**LL:** Thanks!

**JQ:** *You started your career at a very young age and you’ve performed all over the world. Is there a favorite performance memory or a favorite place you like to perform...*

**LL:** Yeah, absolutely!

**JQ:** *...and what inspired you to record this performance in Vienna six years after your last live recording Live at Carnegie Hall?*

**LL:** Hang on, I can answer the second part first. I remember the time I recorded at Carnegie Hall, we did a CD and DVD and it was really a milestone of my career. A few years later, this is my first record for Sony, and I thought, “Wow! After Carnegie Hall it’s really hard to find a place...” So then there’s only one place that has the same prestige as Carnegie Hall: The Musikverein in Vienna. Also, this time we wanted to record not only a CD; but this time, after six to seven years, the technology has improved, so we not only have a DVD but we have Blu-ray DVD and also part of the recital is shot in 3D. So, I thought, “Wow! Let’s find a hall that can do that!” And the first part? My favorite place? My favorite from everything was the Ravinia Festival when I was 17 years old. I was a replacement for the wonderful pianist André Watts and that was the first time I ever played with the Chicago Symphony and Christoph Eschenbach and I shared the stage with Isaac Stern. That was like... I don’t need to express that. Everybody knows how important he was and I will never forget that night: August 14, 1999.

**JQ:** *You mentioned Isaac Stern. What other musicians have inspired you?*

**LL:** Obviously my teachers, like Gary Graffman. He inspired me so much when I came to the states. He’s the one who opened up the whole world to me, the whole Western culture and the whole music world, not only as a teacher but as a person, as a musician, as a mentor. I think he influenced me tremendously. And then there are two more musicians who influenced me a lot, tremendously also. The great conductor and pianist Christoph Eschenbach, who is just taking over the National Symphony in Washington at the Kennedy Center, as the new music director. I am very proud that he is going there. Also, another great pianist and conductor, Daniel Barenboim. I’ve also been working with him for the last six years. So, yeah, I think, of course, there are great musicians who inspire me indirectly through recordings, like Leonard Bernstein and Arthur Rubinstein or Horowitz. But the ones I really had day-to-day work and a solid friendship with are these three people.

**JQ:** *What are you listening to now?*

**LL:** Herbie Hancock. I had the great privilege to tour with him. I certainly love to hear his music and his great inspirational recordings, so jazz music. At the same time, I really like today’s contemporary hip hop people, like Jay-Z and Alicia Keys. Also from old times, I like Paul McCartney and The Beatles.

**JQ:** *For all of the young pianists that are curious, do you still practice your Hanon’s every day?*

**LL:** Not Hanon, but I have something similar: scales and I use Chopin Etudes to practice and sometimes Liszt, but very slowly, not the fast ones; you make the fast ones really slow.

**JQ:** *Thank you so much for taking out this time for us to interview you and we look forward to hearing more of your music.*

– Submitted by Janica Quach, Music Design

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