David Brunell

“A big talent... exquisite taste... formidable technique... marvelous ideas... it was thrilling!”

—St. Louis Post-Dispatch
In our present age, when leading musical critics are questioning the lack of individuality and communicative power in the ranks of today's concert artists, David Brunell has proven to be an artist of a different stamp—one who communicates directly to the hearts and minds of richly varied audiences, both young and mature adults, children, connoisseurs, and critics alike.

Standing ovations and glowing reviews have followed Brunell wherever he has performed. Time and time again, the reviews speak of audiences being spellbound by that rare combination of qualities one critic hailed as "incredible technique" and "the authentic voice of innermost being."

1 See, for example, article by Theodore Libbey, Jr., in Musical America International Directory of the Performing Arts, 1989 Edition, pp. 43-46.

"...captures his audience from the first note..."

"Artistic Ambassador David Brunell captivated the large audience...Several approached the [U.S. Embassy] officer following the recital and said they hadn't heard such a talent in years, not since Claudio Arrau visited Trinidad in the sixties. Many wanted to know how soon we could get him back here...."

—U. S. Embassy, Trinidad

"...captures his audience from the first note, Brunell had the audiences spellbound...superlative performance...."

—U. S. Embassy, Jamaica

"...one of the most poetic as well as technically equipped..."

"...played a splendid recital....How rare it is to find musical awareness and sensitivity, and the technical ability to bring it off combined in the same person. Brunell displayed a big talent...exquisite taste...formidable technique...marvelous ideas...beautiful tone...a touch that lets him color phrases for expressive effect with great subtlety...meticulous preparation...it was thrilling!"

—St. Louis Post-Dispatch

"David Brunell...is one of the most poetic as well as technically equipped pianists I have ever encountered....I couldn't have asked for a more convincing performance" [world premiere of USIA-commissioned work].

—William Mayer, distinguished American composer, New York City
“American pianist David Brunell gave a concert that could be called ‘the recital of the year’ because of the magnificent technical and interpretative abilities of the soloist.... In the Prelude and Fugue in D Major by Bach-Busoni... he displayed his high degree of technical virtuosity, total professionalism, and rich musical sense, which reached the heights of pianistic beauty and expression—all done with captivatingly good musical taste.... In [Scherzo in E Major by Chopin] his marvelous tempos delighted the audience, which enthusiastically applauded his playing. His solid octaves reminded us of a now-famous compatriot of his, Jorge Bolet....”

—Hoy, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

“...the kind of musician...the world of music needs most.”

“David Brunell is the kind of musician this country, indeed the world of music, needs most. He is a superb pianist—one who possesses complete mastery of the instrument of course—but one encounters many of this kind. What sets Mr. Brunell apart is the unfailing musicianship and sense of beauty which emanates from every tone he plays, in the widest variety of styles. His love of music is infectious and it communicates itself through every medium....”

—Balint Vazsonyi, distinguished Hungarian concert pianist, author, and film producer

“...a man utterly in love with the piano...”

“David Brunell came as U.S. Artistic Ambassador, honored as the winner of a competition..., his abilities guaranteed by the magnificent reputation of musical training in his country. The announcements [preceding his arrival], however, did not do him justice, for, having heard him perform, I believe that his message of artistry and friendship will instill him in our memory for all times as an Ambassador-at-Large. With the masterful technique of David Brunell, we forgot the limitations of the baby grand piano used for his recital. Its power increased, its nuances turned subtle; the melodies sang, linking the notes with incredible technique. Brunell’s pianistic mastery transcends the technical benchmarks generally reached by outstanding performers from his country, because in him one can sense the authentic voice of innermost being; he plays the piano with love.

“In his performance of Rachmaninoff’s second Sonata—dense, incessantly voluptuous—David Brunell was submerged, absorbed in his music, which he played marvelously. Performing this work is the task of great artists, and performing it well is the achievement of few. David Brunell played splendidly.”

—Listin Diario, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic [Juilliard-trained critic]

“He played with the touch of a man utterly in love with the piano, always sensitive to the needs of the instrument yet never reluctant to make demands of it...his flair for uninhibited dynamic playing and sensible musicianship was matched by an often brilliant display of technique.”

—St. Louis Globe-Democrat

“...achieved perfect communion with the audience...”

“A remarkable technician, he is first of all a consummate artist...he summons up his technique as a vehicle to convey his most profound feelings to us. A unique evening, unforgettable for anyone who was there.”

—Le Nouvelliste, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

“His recital was really marvelous...outstanding capability...was fully realized by his audience.... Brunell established a genuine rapport with his listeners.... Despite the continuous programming of the bloc countries in the University, never have they presented such a youthful, talented, capable, personable, and professional performer and teacher like Artistic Ambassador David Brunell.”

—U. S. Embassy, Costa Rica

“The pianist showed a tender ability to move the audience...achieved perfect communion with the audience.”

—The Santo Domingo News, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

“...extraordinary...”

“Ecole Nationale des Arts Music Director Guy Scott characterized Brunell as the most talented pianist ever to visit Port-au-Prince. Brunell is the most outstanding cultural program this post has seen in many years...”

—U. S. Embassy, Haiti

“...a pianist of impressive stature...Brunell’s performance of the Berg Sonata was the best I’ve heard....In Op. 116 [Brahms] everything was right—his warm, limpid tone in the quiet intermezzos, his big, fat Brahms sound in the capricios, and his overall understanding of rubato and thematic emphasis....[In the Bach-Busoni D Major Prelude and Fugue] his clever use of pedal, his astonishing variety of tone color, and
his all-around technical facility produced the effect for which many cathedral organists would give their eyeteeth."

—St. Louis Post-Dispatch

"Brunell is an extraordinary young pianist....He gave a thoroughly professional rendition of a concerto that is as difficult as anything in the repertory [world premiere of Piano Concerto by David Canfield]."
—Sunday Herald Times, Bloomington, Indiana

"...standing ovations..."

Brahms' Concerto No. 1...a tremendous success. The audience's applause brought Brunell on stage time and again begging encores.... Brunell established a standard of excellence that will be extremely difficult to equal....[He] not only fully justified his advance notices, but his performances exceeded expectations. Brunell's total immersion in his music and the great strength and yet delicate touch won him standing ovations...."  
—U.S. Embassy, Mexico

"...gave an exceptionally fine concert that really deserved the standing ovation....Brunell... seemed a romantic genius of Liszt's pianistic type...The lightness and sensitivity of his touch were revealed in...Mozart...his warmth and feeling in....Brahms....But it is Brunell's terrific technique in the heavier passages...that most amazes, his ability to create what Shakespeare might describe...as 'such sweet thunder'...played... with...equal virtuosity to that of Horowitz."
—The Daily Gleaner, Kingston, Jamaica

"...bringing the people of the world closer together through the magic of music..."

"Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the outstanding achievement of pianist and teacher Dr. David Brunell [who] represented the U.S. government abroad as an Artistic Ambassador, sponsored by the U.S. Information Agency....His impact...may extend for generations....David Brunell elicited no less than 31 press articles and captioned photographs in Dominican newspapers alone during his brief stay on the island of the Dominican Republic....I want to emphasize that David Brunell is an outstanding citizen....His willingness to serve his country as an Artistic Ambassador makes me proud. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. David Brunell for personally bringing the people of the world closer together through the magic of music."
—U.S. Representative Lee H. Hamilton, in the United States Congressional Record

David Brunell has concertized widely in the United States as well as in Latin America and Europe. His performances have also been broadcast on numerous radio and television stations in many countries, including New York City's WQXR, and he has made several recordings for Enharmonic Records.

The many awards Brunell has received include first prizes in the Music Teachers National Association National Competition and the Beethoven Sonata Competition, the prize for the best performance of the required work in the New Orleans International Competition, top prizes in the Young Keyboard Artists, New Orleans, and Louise D. McMahon International Competitions, selection to the European International Festival sponsored by Concerts Atlantique (one of 30 selected from over 1400 applicants), a Fellowship from the Minnesota State Arts Board, and selection to the Artistic Ambassador Program sponsored by the United States Information Agency.

Brunell's studies were at Indiana University, where he received his undergraduate, master's and doctoral degrees, as well as the University's highest musical and academic awards, the Joseph Battista Memorial Award, the Performer's Certificate, and the John H. Edwards Fellowship. His teachers included his mother, Margaret French Brunell, Dorothy Dring Smutz, Adele Marcus, Donald Walker, Sidney Foster, Zadel Skolovsky, Balint Vazsonyi, and Walter Robert.

Following several years on the faculty of St. Olaf College, Brunell joined the faculty of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in 1992.

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