

# Classical Gas: Yana Reznik brings concert hall musicians to Hermosa Beach

By [Kevin Cody](#) | April 29th, 2010



**Last Saturday's Live at the Lounge: Clarinetist Ben Lulich, mezzo-soprano Iris Malkin, pianist Yana Reznik, and pianist Rufus Choi. Photo by Bondo Wyszpolski**

*by Bondo Wyszpolski*

Anybody can move a car, but it takes just the right combination of people to move a mountain, and that's what's been happening with Classical Music L.A., a weekly gathering of exquisite musicians who perform on Saturday evenings at Live at the Lounge in Hermosa Beach.

The venue, which adjoins The Comedy and Magic Club, is in an area that caters to a younger clientele with a yen for something fast and lively. Subtlety doesn't much factor in. Even so, owner Mike Lacey has envisioned a classical music series inside Live at the Lounge for quite a while, but the push from idea to actualization came by way of music enthusiast Jim Eninger, who made sure that Lacey paired up with someone who could ensure that the endeavor would have every chance possible to succeed. And that's how pianist Yana Reznik became Lacey's artistic advisor.

Reznik and her assortment of guest musicians – the lineup changes each week – gave another compelling concert this past weekend. Afterwards, audience members mostly hung around and spoke with one another or with the artists themselves. I talked for a few minutes with Laurence Vittes, who came onstage before each performer to introduce them. I remember Vittes from his days as classical music critic for the L.A. Reader, although this was the first time we'd met. Coincidentally, we ran into one another less than 24 hours later at the opening of "Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo" at the Mark Taper Forum. Not only that, on this very same evening I came face to face with two other people who had attended the performance at Live at the Lounge: An older gentleman and his wife said they'd driven in from Orange County, and somewhere in the conversation mentioned that they were going to

be attending Wagner's "Götterdämmerung" the following afternoon. Well, what were the chances that we'd cross paths again?

The point is, anything can happen if you attend one of the concerts at Live at the Lounge.



**Pianist and classical music advisor Yana Reznik.**

### **Why it's special**

Yana Reznik and I spoke on the telephone a few days ago and she told me that what has interested her is the way in which classical music is presented. Typically, she says, there is a formal distance between artist and audience – the audience sits up straight and proper and the event remains formal throughout. But she pictured something much more casual, where people could dress down if they want, eat and drink if they want, and gab afterwards with the performers, if they want.

As an in-demand performer in her own right, Reznik already has a full plate, but she also seems to be very good at networking, and knows dozens and dozens of musicians she can draw on as guest artists. Each program features four or five segments, and if there's a trio or a quartet, the evening could end up with any number of people taking the stage. In other words, Reznik crafts each program so that it varies from one artist to another, highlights what each one does best, and keeps the audience interested.

"The performance mixes it up between the instruments and between the ensembles," she says, "so we don't have too much of the same thing in one particular show."

As for who will be playing on any given night: "I talk to people and see what their availability is, and what programs they would like to play." The musicians then give her a list and Reznik chooses from it and works it into the overall program.

And what kind of repertoire does Reznik favor?

First of all, she points out, they'll usually do selections from longer works, rather than the entire piece. Let's say there's a 25-minute sonata in four movements; Reznik or one of the guest artists may perform just one or two movements from it. What this does is showcase the work.

"People can say, Hmm, I kind of like that one movement; maybe I should go home and listen to the rest of it."

On the other hand, just as she mixes up the instruments from one set to the next, Reznik may also inject

a known quantity next to an unknown and perhaps more challenging quantity. Some of us flounder through contemporary music, but are more willing to give it a shot if we know that it's embraced on either side by something we can get our hands and ears around. If we sugarcoat the avant-garde, it's easier to swallow, right?

As time has gone on, other musicians have heard about the series and have initiated the contact. They introduce themselves and send Reznik their press kits and their music.

"There's no shortage of great musicians in Los Angeles," she says, "and that's the wonderful thing."

What's less wonderful, Reznik continues, is the lack of first-rate venues, a setting that is not only intimate but where the acoustics and the sound system work for, rather than against, the performer. That's another key reason why, among musicians, the word has been spreading.

The idea of such an intimate gathering – I think the capacity at Live at the Lounge is something like 90 – calls to mind the drawing room concerts we associate with 18th or 19th century salons, in which artists of every stripe would mingle with the well-to-do. Reznik agrees, but says that it's a tradition that has been lost, by and large. And yet, this being a case in point, that tradition reasserts itself from time to time. There are people who long for this sort of thing!

### **Step right this way**

It's possible to attend one show, and then never want to be anywhere else.

"People have mentioned that they would love to have a season ticket," Reznik says. "A few people come every single Saturday and they haven't missed one event yet – and it's been two and a half months. They just find it to be the thing to do on Saturday night."

Although Classical Music L.A. isn't in direct competition with Hermosa's downtown club and bar scene, it may be an awareness of the latter that keeps some folks away. Atmospheric contamination, or something. Reznik, for her part, has to do a lot of convincing as well.

"I tell my friends, look, if you make a day out of this you can come to the beach, hang out, enjoy the weather, and then come for dinner after that. You don't have to dress up; you don't have to get ready for this. Instead of going to a bar or club that's there, you come to a classical music event."

The cover charge is only 12 bucks, which is a good deal, but there's also a two-drink minimum, a sort of clause in the contract that I've never liked because I tend to drink less than a camel in the Sahara, and would rather walk into a club and pay \$20 or \$25, receive my drink vouchers which I could use or hand off to someone else, and then sit back and enjoy the show without the waitress eyeing the level of my glass every few minutes. Maybe they waive the drink minimum if you purchase dinner, I didn't ask, nor did I eat, although the food looked good.

The atmosphere inside is nice and cozy, in large part because of the subdued lighting and glow of the candles on each table. Some outside noise does filter in, and there may be no way around that, the reality of Hermosa Avenue being just outside the front door, but it can be a distraction. The same might be said of the servers, as discreet as they are. Also, given the caliber of the event, and the fact that the performers are in some of their finest clothes, I feel that the servers – well, the women at least – should wear dresses or skirts. It would look a little classier.

Now let's get back to that phone conversation.

### **The enrichment plan**

"I'm very passionate about trying to find very creative ways of presenting music," Reznik says, when I ask her about her own ambitions. "I believe very much in the positive energy of music, how energy in music transforms the audience and why it affects people. I just think that, as musicians, it's really our

mission to change people in some way and to enrich their lives.”

She’s not ignoring the fact that the musicians themselves get something out of this as well – being onstage, being recognized, being praised. And Reznik mentions another concert series that she started; it’s called Artistic Voyage, and it takes place in Yorba Linda.

“The idea there is that we combine the arts; we combine paintings, photography; we have an exhibit before the concert for an hour; we bring wine and food and people socialize and hang out. After that, we have a concert. But the main goal is to bring people pleasure.” And lastly, she adds, some of the concert proceeds go to charitable organizations, whether it’s to benefit disaster relief in Haiti or to assist hospitals that provide free health care.

“So really,” Reznik continues, “I believe that it’s not just enough to do it for the sake of music. We’re, in a way, ambassadors of goodness as well.” And again she speaks of the power and positive energy of music as a higher level of communication.

It would be impossible to contradict her after last Saturday’s performance, which began with the very lovely mezzo-soprano Iris Malkin singing the “Seis Canciones” of Eduard Toldrà, accompanied by Reznik on piano. Her voice can soothe the beast within, and the atmosphere was enhanced by the golden glow of the stage lights and the warm wood paneling behind her, a coloring that also enhanced her creamy skin tone and her red silk dress.

The music of Frédéric Chopin was favored, first by Reznik herself (she played the “Sonata No. 2 in B-flat Minor”), and later, to cap the program, by Rufus Choi (rousing performances of the “Scherzo No. 1 in B Minor” and the “Scherzo No. 2 in B-Flat Minor”). And, in between, clarinetist Ben Lulich joined Reznik for charming and animated renditions of Luigi Bassi’s “Fantasia da concerto” and Vittorio Monti’s “Csárdás.”

Another great passion of Yana Reznik – as if we haven’t already guessed it – is to help promote her fellow classical musicians, and this is even more important than before because schools are cutting back their music programs and some venues, colleges among them, are trying to save money by limiting funding for concerts.

Some musicians, Reznik says, “just sit around and wait for somebody great in the audience to recognize them and create a career for them, but it doesn’t happen like that. So that’s another thing I’m trying, by setting an example. I try to help my friends and try to organize something for them as well,” and to get them onstage where they belong, and where their skills can be appreciated. It’s just lucky for all of us that Reznik has the energy, the passion, and the contacts, and the desire to see it all come together and continue as long as possible. And as for that, well, it all depends on the audience. This week there’s a surprise guest artist, so maybe it’s the right time to give this venue and its offerings our undivided attention.