

## Shanghai pianist at The Breakers is fitting opener for the 39th season

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By James J. Gillis/Daily News staff

NEWPORT - Newport Music Festival General Director Mark P. Malkovich III wanted to bring pianist Ren Zhang to the festival the minute he heard him playing Chopin on the radio.

On Friday night it was easy to see why.

Zhang, 34, made his Newport debut at The Breakers as the festival opened its 39th season. He delivered a solid, if not overly flashy, program of Chopin, opening with five short pieces. He has a deft and light style on the keys, moving from the melodic to the more combusive sections.

The highlight came on the brooding "Sonata No. 2 in B Minor, Op. 57," which Zhang handled in masterful fashion.

Malkovich heard Zhang on a classical radio station during a drive to Boston. Impressed, Malkovich called the station, which put him in touch with Zhang's record company.

Malkovich was thrilled to find the Shanghai native was living in New York and available to open the festival.

Zhang wore a white shirt, white bow tie, a long black waistcoat and black pants before the full house at The Breakers.

Deadlines kept a reporter from staying for the rest of the concert, which was scheduled to include two long Rachmaninoff pieces.

While the crowd generously cheered Zhang, the young pianist unknowingly had friends in the crowd for moral support. Chiyong Hung is a pianist and music teacher in New York City. She studied with Zhang at the Manhattan School of Music.

"He has no idea that we're here," she said outside the mansion before the concert began.

"He's very excited about playing this venue. It's such a beautiful place. I think this will be a great night for him. He's a wonderful and noble musician."



Ren Zhang performs at The Breakers for the opening night concert of the Newport Music Festival. (Jacqueline Marque/Daily News staff)

Opening night often draws people who have been connected to the festival for years, such as members of the board of directors. Gov. Donald L. Carcieri and wife Sue are regulars.

"My wife is very much into music," the governor said. "And she's gotten me into it. She's been active in the arts, performing in community theater, that kind of thing. This is a unique event and we try not to miss it."

Seated next to the Republican Carcieri and his wife were former Gov. J. Joseph Garrahy, a Democrat, and wife Marguerite. Garrahy, who served from 1977-85, said he and his wife often drive from their Narragansett home to events in Newport.

"We get to this festival as often as we can," he said. "We enjoy it. We'll be here again before the season ends. Mark (Malkovich) does a great job in finding talent from all over the world."