

THE BOSTON GLOBE SATURDAY, MAY 20, 1995

*Pianist Berman finds the passion,
surprises in Faure*

By Richard Dyer
GLOBE STAFF

CAMBRIDGE - If the music of Faure means anything at all to you, it can come to mean nearly

everything. Hardly a phrase of Faure's could be mistaken for the work of another composer.

He is generally praised for the subtlety of his harmony and the finesse of his workmanship, but there is nothing mild about his music, which is structurally sound, enlivened by counterpoint and often passionate in its outpouring of feeling. The music constantly springs surprises: It never goes where you think it will, and the surprises have the force of inevitability. Performance of Faure's music depends on level of virtuosity—above all a virtuosity of imagination.

The pianist Donald Berman is particularly attached to Faure and organized a concert at Harvard Thursday night to commemorate the 150th birthday of the composer May 12. He participated in the entire program, offering three piano pieces, joining violinist David Chan and cellist Andrew Mark for the Piano Trio, Op. 120, and collaborating with baritone Sanford Sylvan in the song cycle "La Bonne Chanson."

The acoustics of Paine Hall, bright and ringing, are not particularly helpful to piano music in general. Nevertheless

DONALD BERMAN, piano
With Sanford Sylvan,
baritone; David
Chan, violin; and Andrew
Mark, cello
At: *Paine Hall, Harvard
University,
Thursday night*

particularly effective in a powerful atmospheric and luminescent performance of the Sixth Nocturne. And it was interesting to hear Faure's own piano transcription of the prelude to "Penelope." The late Piano Trio, a product of his 78th year, is a distilled and elusive work that was given a potently direct performance.

Directness was a virtue of the performance of the Verlaine cycle "La Bonne Chanson" by Sylvan and Berman. Over the last couple of years, Sylvan's voice has grown substantially, gaining particular impact and ring at the top while retaining the lucidity and transparency that have always been its most cherishable characteristics. Sylvan's ear remains impeccable; his art deepens with every appearance. The performers seemed especially attuned to the emotional ambivalence of the fifth song and the delicacy of detail in the sixth. Sylvan said his own favorite is the seventh song; he wasn't happy with how it went so he and Berman offered it again as their encore. It was thrilling to hear such idiomatic French, such musical and emotional

it was clear that Berman is a strong, centered, flexible pianist with a gift for the suppleness of rhythm and especially of color Faure's music demands. He was

understanding and a real voice unleashed on this cycle. Sylvan does need to be wary of letting too many phrases end in the same dying fall; that belongs to a tradition his performance replaces, a tradition of artful dodging.