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Watching Musicians Evolve Onstage

By **BEN RATLIFF**

Whenever a respected jazz musician — the pianist Chick Corea, say — encounters a musician a few generations younger, some kind of tutorial takes place. But now it's likely that those younger musicians — the 17-year-old pianists [Beka Gochiashvili](#) and [Gadi Lehavi](#), say — aren't the only ones being tutored. The relationship becomes public, through concerts and recordings and interviews and practice-room YouTube videos, much faster than it ever did before. Some of us enjoy seeing wisdom transferred; we're willing to buy into that relationship, or even triangulate ourselves into it in some indirect way.

Jazz is a complex and mysterious language — growing all the time or not growing fast enough, depending on how you look at it — and learners can use the influence and encouragement of their heroes to start making sense of it. It's good for them.

But is it as good for us? If a musician can grow at all through the wishes and desires of his audience, shouldn't we push him to have a separate identity, one that challenges and reorients us? It is well understood that musicians need to handle their development with caution. It is less understood that listeners have their own development to consider, as well.

[Mr. Corea](#), 71, is a natural mentor: curious, virtuosic, willing to risk failure. As part of his mini-festival at Jazz at Lincoln Center that ended on Sunday — the main event was his Rose Theater concert with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, an ensemble [he played with in 2011](#) — he presented on Friday, in the Allen Room, two highly accomplished younger players he has worked with before.

Both were born in 1996 — [Mr. Gochiashvili](#) in Tbilisi, Georgia, and [Mr. Lehavi](#) in Tel Aviv — and both have had some premature recognition in America. Videos of [Mr. Lehavi](#) in front of audiences have circulated for the last three years or so. In one, [playing a five-minute solo with a trio at the New York jazz club Smoke](#), he's a diminutive figure on the bench, eerily self-possessed, flowing and burning, channeling Keith Jarrett and probably [Mr. Corea](#) too.

[Mr. Gochiashvili](#) has played a few times [at Birdland](#) and the Blue Note, and competed well in the 2011 Thelonious Monk Piano Competition. He's lived in New York the last several years, studying at Juilliard with Frank Kimbrough and taking private classes with Fred Hersch and Danilo Pérez. All of this seems pertinent information, though I wish it were less so.

On Friday the two pianists played about 40 minutes each, not with their own bands and their own music but with a master-level ad hoc group performing mostly [Mr. Corea's](#) tunes: the saxophonist [Ravi Coltrane](#), the trumpeter [Wallace Roney](#), the bassist [John Patitucci](#) and

the drummer Marcus Gilmore. In any case, I heard more of Mr. Gochiashvili than Mr. Lehavi.

Mr. Lehavi will soon be very ready. He gave us restraint, and open space, and clear logic, if burying his own identity a little bit. He played long, tensile eighth-note lines, rocking calmly at the keyboard, interacting with the changing patterns from the rhythm section. He remained fluent in what's become an old piano language, shaped some 40 years ago by Mr. Jarrett, Mr. Corea and Herbie Hancock. And when the young pianists together played "Matrix," Mr. Corea's darting blues, played with the rhythm section, he did what many wouldn't expect or even want from a teenager: he slowed down, making his time seem to float.

Mr. Gochiashvili was ready yesterday. He gave us dazzle and ownership. He pulled the band during his own solos and while accompanying others. (Against Mr. Coltrane, a dynamic soloist, he stabbed, glided, drifted.) In his own "Un Gran Abrazo," he blizzarded a long solo with the right hand alone. His touch was special, even in introductions and final flourishes; he built waves within his playing, revealing softnesses in his sound even while working intensely.

Look for both pianists soon. Take them on their own terms.