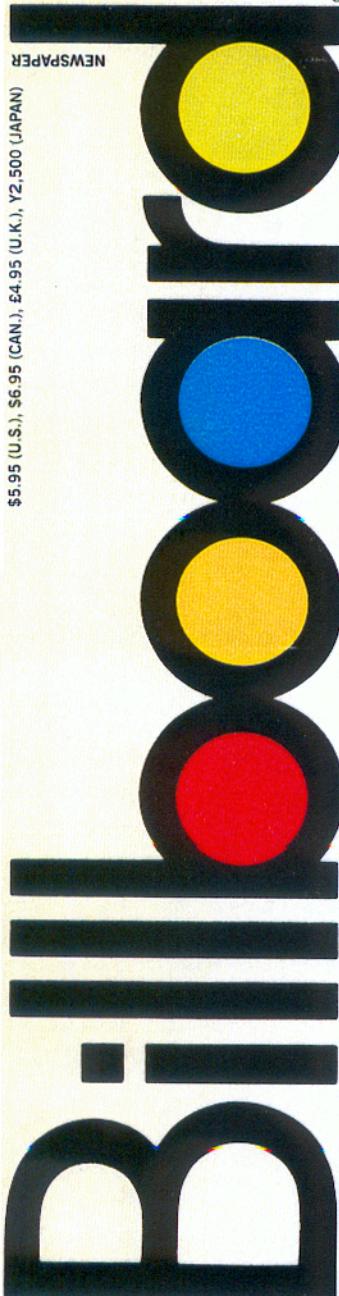


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NEW YORK-BASED PIANIST Alan Gampel has a problem. He's happy with his playing, with the audiences he's reaching, even with the privately produced CDs he's selling. Yet, of course, he'd like to get signed by a major label. This is where the problem arises: The 35-year-old Gampel is a talented, fiery, dedicated artist, but he is not—like one recent major-label signee—a former Fendi runway model. And he hasn't, like another, posed for *Playboy*.

What Gampel does is just play the piano extraordinarily well. In today's world, that may not be enough to get him signed—even though a single audition with **Daniel Barenboim** got him a performance with the **Chicago Symphony Orchestra**, playing **Leonard Bernstein's "Age Of Anxiety."** A single sitting with **Semyon Bychkov** also landed him a concert with the **Orchestre De Paris**. But when he met with a top New York publicist recently, it was as though they spoke different languages. The publicist kept asking for Gampel's "angle," wanting to know how to sell him as a story. Gampel simply wants to succeed on his merits as a pianist.

Gampel laments that "50 years ago, A&R people were musicians who picked musicians they loved. Now, no one is interested in developing careers—they just want instant success by pop music standards." Gampel recorded a private **Chopin** disc in '97 that has sold relatively well by classical standards: 8,000 copies, almost entirely at his 40-odd concerts a year. He is now recording the **Liszt** and Chopin B-minor Sonatas, as well as his solo arrangement of Chopin's "Fantasy On Polish Airs," for the audiophile imprint Mapleshade. So, despite his ambitions, working with big-name labels isn't the alpha and omega for the musicianly Gampel: "As long as I can keep playing concerts, communicating my passion to a diverse audience of music lovers, I'm happy."



GAMPEL