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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

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."