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## USC News

### A Pianist With a Penchant for Poetry

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The renowned Alfred Brendel visits campus to share an unexpected side of his talent.

By Diane Krieger

*"When Christo had wrapped the Three Tenors/on the balcony of La Scala/the civilized world fell unnaturally silent."*

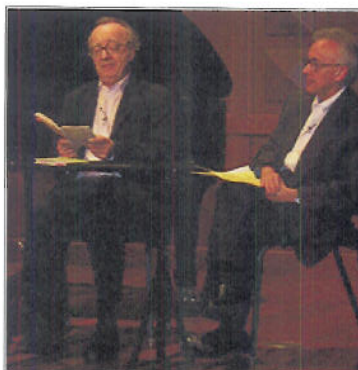
Such were the choice morsels of poetic mischief dropping from the lips of world-famous pianist Alfred Brendel on a recent visit to USC's Jeannette McDonald Hall. In town for a Disney Hall concert, Brendel gave a poetry reading – that's right, poetry – on March 12 as a guest of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's Brain and Creativity Institute and the USC Thornton School of Music.

It seems the Austrian-born, London-based concert artist leads a double life as a polyglot versifier; his stanzas have been published in German, English and French.

Asked to distinguish between his pianistic and his poetic muses, the 76-year-old Brendel said, in charmingly-accented English, "as a pianist, I try to sing. My poems don't sing. They speak." They also strive for – and achieve – dry blasts of hilarity.

His first poem *One Finger Too Many* – composed a dozen years ago in the midst of a sleepless flight to Tokyo – concerns the inexplicable growth of a peripatetic digit prone to popping up anywhere on its unfortunate owner's anatomy.

What's a pianist with a taste for the absurd to do? "It's hard to make the audience smile or laugh when something funny happens in a piece of music," Brendel said with characteristic deadpan humor. Poetry doesn't have this problem.



Alfred Brendel, left, waxes poetically for Antonio Damasio.

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