Lang Lang Is Back: A Piano Superstar Grows Up

Returning after a career-threatening injury, the world's most famous classical pianist is rethinking his approach to music.

It was late one afternoon this spring, and Madison Square Garden's 10,000 seats were empty as Billy Joel and Lang Lang began jamming onstage.

Pop's piano man had invited the superstar classical pianist to make a guest appearance at his sold-out Apell show at the Garden, and they were rehearsing a duet of Mr. Joel's "Root Beer Rag" during the soundcheck, taking it from fast to blisteringly fast.

Then they started goofing around. Suddenly they were trading riffs from Beethoven's "Emperor" Concerto. They teamed up on some Bach. Finally, with Mr. Joel's hand looking on in surprise, the two launched into the thunderous opening of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1.