

One day in the life of a classy pianist

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IGNAT SOLZHENITSYN

City Recital Hall, Angel Place,, May 1.

If Ignat Solzhenitsyn goes on giving recitals of the standard he reached on this occasion, it won't be long before people cease to introduce him as his famous novelist father's piano-playing son. His own renown will be self-sufficient.

His technique is comfortably equal to all the many different demands he made of it. His readiness to change mood and attack in sympathy with the music is phenomenal. He is able to make the narrative the linear coherence of what he plays continuously evident to his listeners.

This was nowhere more apparent than in Mozart's sonata in F, K533, with its finale revised from the free-standing rondo of K494. The middle movement of this work embodies in its main theme one of Mozart's most subtly inflected exercises in long-distance melody spinning.

Solzhenitsyn made compellingly audible for us the composer's teasing reluctance to close a decisive cadence and had us metaphorically holding our breaths as the great melody unwound itself through unpredictable twists and turns. At its final return, we knew that the pianist had established beyond all doubt the calibre of Mozart's invention and the supremacy of the work in this program, complementing the slow movement with a first movement of prodigal impetus and a final movement of bright-toned alacrity.

Some pianists with claims to direct contact with Bartok have made the first movement of his piano sonata (1926) sound laboured and even pedantic, perhaps as a result of making too much of the word *moderato* in the composer's *allegro moderato* marking.

Solzhenitsyn's happy judgment of tempo, faster but never hurried, ensured that the music's phrases fell effortlessly into place within the movement's total scheme. The Bartok finale was no less convincing. If the slow movement sometimes sounded like a bottomed-out suspension meeting a corrugated road, it has to be remembered that Bartok arrived at this unforgiving texture at a time

when an excess of upholstery in some late romantic music seemed to call for stern correction.

According to Solzhenitsyn's own impromptu words from the platform, it was only a chance reading of the printed program that alerted him to the fact that it discussed Skryabin's relatively early third sonata when what he was actually going to play was Skryabin's last sonata, No.10. As the third sonata has been promised in print since the SSO issued its subscription brochure last year, this suggests some fault in liaison between the organisation and its soloists.

From a listener's point of view, the change is more likely to have been welcome than not. The 10th sonata is one of the points of culmination in the composer's journey towards a condition of lustrous stasis in his music, animated by trills and repeated chords that suggest a breeze-ruffled surface in softer passages and the beating of giant wings at climaxes.

Solzhenitsyn's identification with the immobilised gleam of this music sounded so complete that it seemed miraculous that he could also give a thoroughly convincing account of an early Schubert sonata, D575 in B, in which this composer's ability to prise open crevices in standard harmonic progressions allows him to give an impression of endless choice and unlimited journeying.