

Pianist Solzhenitsyn dazzles with depth

Nuanced play highlights various emotions in music

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IGNAT SOLZHENITSYN, pianist, in concert at Abravanel Hall; Saturday evening, Feb. 7; one performance only

Pianist Ignat Solzhenitsyn dazzled the audience Saturday evening in a recital performance that was powerful and dramatic.

The Russian virtuoso, son of famed author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, performed only two works: Beethoven's massive "Thirty-three Variations on a Waltz by Anton Diabelli," op. 120, and Liszt's magnificent Sonata in B minor. Yet in these two works Solzhenitsyn showed what an incredible talent he is. He performed this music with a profound depth of understanding that made these works come alive.

This was especially apparent in the Liszt sonata. This work, from 1852-53, is a study in contrasts.

Abrupt and extreme changes in dynamics and emotions are common in this work. Solzhenitsyn got straight into the heart of this work and extracted every bit of emotion out of it. His performance of this sonata was incomparable. He is a brilliant technician who never lets his mastery of the keyboard get in the way of the music. He also knows how to play lyrical passages with the utmost simplicity that makes them sing.

The Liszt sonata is somewhat untraditional in form. It's in one movement, yet one can clearly discern four distinct sections, roughly corresponding to the usual four movements of a sonata. The thematic material of this work is based on one motive that recurs throughout the work in various guises, a device that's rather common in the romantic period, and something that Liszt was a master at exploiting.

The first half of the recital was taken up by Beethoven's "Diabelli Variations." In this work Beethoven explores all the possibilities of the variation form. There is an immense range of thematic and harmonic material that is astounding considering the simple little dance

tune that is the basis for this hourlong work.

In spite of the fact that there are so many variations, they are all logical extensions of the previous material so that one has the feeling of one large, extended work.

Solzhenitsyn handled this large work with complete mastery. It was simply incredible watching him perform. Beethoven's variations run the gamut from the playful to the dramatic to the profound, and Solzhenitsyn performed all this with nuanced play that highlighted the various emotions exhibited in these variations.

This was an evening of monumental piano music that will not soon be forgotten. Solzhenitsyn gave his audience a performance where nothing was lacking. He showed what a truly outstanding pianist he is, showing a mastery of his instrument that goes far beyond his years.

The audience applauded him enthusiastically and gave him a standing ovation that was well-deserved. This was a very fulfilling recital, and hopefully Solzhenitsyn will return to Abravanel Hall in the not-so-distant future.