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**Solzhenitsyn: A great artist in the making**

November 11, 2007

By Jim Lowe Staff Writer

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BRATTLEBORO — A Vermont-bred musician is well on his way to becoming one of the world's great artists. Pianist Ignat Solzhenitsyn, who grew up in Cavendish and received his early training in southern Vermont, performed an all-Brahms solo recital, Friday at Centre Congregational Church for the Brattleboro Music Center, which revealed a power and depth seldom heard among young artists.

When the 35-year-old Solzhenitsyn began his program with the Scherzo in e-flat minor, Opus 4, it wasn't entirely promising. While it was certainly well-played technically, odd rubato and emphases made the interpretation seem inconsistent. But, immediately after, when he launched into the Four Ballades, Opus 10, it was a completely different story. Here was an artist to be reckoned with.

Born in Moscow in 1972, Solzhenitsyn moved to Vermont in 1976 as his father, Nobel Prize-winning author Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, had been exiled from the Soviet Union. His first piano teacher was the Brattleboro Music Center's Chongyo Shin, and he performed his first solo recital and played Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 2 with the BMC's Windham Orchestra, both at the age of 11.

Mentored by pianist Rudolf Serkin, Solzhenitsyn went to study with Marlboro's Luis Batlle, Maria Curcio and Claudio Arrau, and at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute, Gary Graffman. Today, Solzhenitsyn makes his home with his wife and two children in Philadelphia, where he teaches at Curtis and is music director of the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia. He also returns to Vermont regularly, where he is a senior participant at the Marlboro Music Festival.

Solzhenitsyn's performance of Brahms' Opus 10 Ballades was riveting. His ability to corral the contrasting moods and turn them into a seamless musical experience proved convincing. But, more importantly, the musical excitement he imbued the music with — all the time maintaining the reserve so appropriate in Brahms — resulted in a deeply moving experience.

Throughout, Solzhenitsyn played with a technique and style that seemed organic, never affected or eccentric, and his interpretations seemed virtually inevitable. His experience as a conductor paid off with his broad concepts and understanding of the structures of the works, every phrase placed in context. Lyrical passages were especially effective as they seemed to ebb and flow naturally. The playing, not so much refined as earthy, resulted in the grandeur that makes Brahms so warm and wonderful.

Solzhenitsyn's performance of the Variations on a Theme by Schumann, Opus 9, was a kaleidoscope of styles and moods, performed with the aforementioned flair. The Six Piano Pieces, Opus 118, mixed passion, tenderness, lyricism and power, all when appropriate. Solzhenitsyn is a pianist to watch.



ENLARGE IMAGE

**BRATTLEBORO MUSIC CENTER**

The Brattleboro Music Center Chamber Music Series will present violinist Jennifer Koh and pianist Benjamin Hochman, Saturday, Feb. 9, at 8 p.m., at the Centre Congregational Church, Main Street in Brattleboro. For information, call (802) 257-4523, or go online to [www.bmcvt.org](http://www.bmcvt.org).

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