

Review: Music

# A grasp of form, color in a masterful recital

By Daniel Webster  
INQUIRER MUSIC CRITIC

Pianist Ignat Solzhenitsyn is becoming the city's most ardent proponent of the big Schubert sonatas. He ended his recital Tuesday at Curtis Institute with the *Sonata in B flat major* in a performance that celebrated the music's lyricism and extraordinary vision.

Ahead of his generation in exploring Schubert's later music, Solzhenitsyn had played Schubert in his recital debut here two years ago. To speak of his natural affinities as a musician is to undervalue the process involved in preparing these big pieces. Their reach, inner dramas and separate chapters work in performance only through the player's control of time and pace, color and elasticity.

Solzhenitsyn's control and coloration struck the right tone. Honed but not smoothed into neutrality, his playing caught the tumult beneath the soaring melodies of the first movement, celebrated the harmonic thrusts, and maintained coherence. The movement's timeless narration never lost its vitality. He built the drama through pauses, finely judged tempo changes and details that prepared the return of the melodic basis for the whole movement.

Its length and evolution were refreshing, for the playing carried a strong sense of discovery.

Playing in the other movements expanded on the extraordinary grasp of the first. Solzhenitsyn ensured buoyancy in the quick light sections and in the evolving moods of the final rondo.

His one-performance-only program began with Debussy and went on to Mozart and Bartok. Each work was distinctively imagined, and only in the three pieces from Debussy's *Images* did his playing seem uncomfortable and forced. In Bartok's *Sonata*, he pounded thunderous intervals in the bass and contrasting the lyricism and the motoric patterns that pulse through the work. His sense of the music's grand scheme kept its drama in focus, and the final battering chords brought a sense of satisfaction that came from clear exposition.

The *Mozart Rondo in A minor* (K. 511) was probably the best of the recital. Within its succinct length, Solzhenitsyn found a wealth of shading and nuance, rhythmic clarity that propelled the music, and subtle means of renewing the vigor of the rondo tune in every entrance. His playing exalted the music's form, color and explorative joy.



Ignat Solzhenitsyn  
performed Tuesday  
at Curtis Institute.