

Gilmore Young Artist Award-winner Ivan Moshchuk gives dynamic Baltimore recital

By Tim Smith
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It takes a certain amount of nerve -- or maybe just youth, as an audience member suggested to me -- for a pianist to program as hefty a program as the one 19-year-old Ivan Moshchuk delivered Saturday afternoon at An die Musik.

On the first half: the Bach/Busoni Chaconne and Beethoven's "Appassionata." On the second: a set of Scriabin Preludes and Rachmaninoff's Sonata No. 2. That's a lot of finger-busting for one afternoon, but Moshchuk sounded like he could have added a few much such challenges without breaking a sweat; this was a very impressive demonstration of talent and potential.

Moshchuk, who studies with Boris Slutsky at Peabody, recently was named one of two recipients of the 2010 Gilmore Young Artist Award, which includes a \$15,000 grant and a commission for a new work. Like the Gilmore Award, which carries a \$300,000 prize and is given to an established pianist, this nod to young artists is non-competitive; candidates typically have no idea they are under consideration. The Gilmore brand has become quite prestigious over the past two decades. It was easy on Saturday to hear what evaluators must have found so appealing about this particularly pianist.

The Moscow-born Moshchuk, who was raised in Michigan, has a pronounced virtuoso streak -- there were times when it seemed like he couldn't wait to get to the next bravura passage. Like many pianists, he took the finale of the "Appassionata" at such a good clip from the get-go that there wasn't much room for contrast at the home stretch. Still, he put across the bold, bracing quality of the score very effectively. During the wildest dashes of the Beethoven score and the thunderous outer movements of the Rachmaninoff, note-counters could have tallied a few misses, but that hardly mattered in light of so much absorbing, dynamic music-making.

Moshchuk had something meaningful to say throughout the recital. When, for example, he reached the major key section of the Chaconne, he sculpted the phrases with a deal of expressive warmth. The second movement of the Rachmaninoff sonata was likewise delivered eloquently, as was, to an even greater degree, the encore from Rachmaninoff's Etudes-Tableaux, Op. 39 (the darkly poetic No. 2 in A minor).

When all was played and done, I wouldn't have minded more contrasting repertoire on the program, but it was impossible not to be impressed with Moshchuk's handling of the material. I look forward to hearing him again.