

Pianist Ivan Moshchuk in Smedes Parlor: Promising Present Meets Genteel Past

By Paul D. Williams

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Pianist Ivan Moshchuk is twenty-one years old, and one reviewer has already assigned him "...the highest marks for accuracy, musicality, command, technique and sensitivity." He brought a mix of these qualities to Saint Mary's School to close out the 2011-12 season of that school's exceptional Smedes Parlor Concert Series. For this presentation he chose works from three mutually contemporary Russian composers, two quite well known and one scarcely at all.

The honored guest opened with the obscure member of this Russian trio, Nicholas Medtner (1880-1951), pianist, composer and professor, who was a champion of romanticism as opposed to modern innovations. His "Fairy Tale" consisted of a blend of dainty melodies and bravura passages. More substantial was the Sonata "Reminiscenza," described by Moshchuk as "profoundly nostalgic," alternately pensive and vehement.

Next he called upon Scriabin (1872-1915) and his two-movement Sonata No. 2 in G-sharp minor. In the Andante, the pianist was at his most effective as he coaxed seemingly reluctant sonorities from those celebrated measures. A superb technician (in the good sense of that word), he was clearly up to the challenging demands of the huge Presto.

Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) was the lone composer after intermission. From the Opus 23 Preludes, he chose the somber No. 3 in D minor and the more cheerful and song-like No. 4 in D major. The pianist brought verve and a mastery to these pieces, properly justifying one writer's assertion that the Preludes "...contain many strokes of genius, elegant and eloquent pages created by a consummate master of the piano idiom."

In the great Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor, he was able to beat the well-named Allegro agitato into submission. In the slow movement, marked simply Non allegro, he was again at his most contemplative in drawing out the recurring themes. The Allegro molto came across with the same agitation and ferocity as the beginning of the work.

So here is a young artist with matinee good looks and admirable stage presence. He has won more than his fair share of prestigious awards. He is currently privileged to study piano performance with Leon Fleisher (who studied with Schnabel!). What's to prevent him from eventually assuming his place in the front row with this world's great pianists?