



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Savitski's fill-in performance at Gilmore Festival was anything but

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KALAMAZOO -- The final performance in this season's Rising Stars Recital Series, sponsored by the Gilmore Festival, was to feature Francesco Tristano Schlimme Sunday night at Wellspring Theater. Unfortunately, his visa did not come through in time.

Consequently, the Gilmore brought in another talented young pianist, Russian-born Edisher Savitski. His performance here Sunday precedes his playing the same recital Dec. 11 at Carnegie's Zankel Hall in New York City.

Based on Sunday's performance, he will have little practicing to do.

In a challenging program, Savitski exhibited a stylish manner at the keyboard, sitting erect with fleet hands at the ready. His amazing hands could coax a delicate melody at double pianissimo or violently strike the keys for booming fortissimos. The program he chose assured a need for numerous double and triple fortes, to the delight of many in the modest audience (attendance was probably affected by the weather).

When the talented pianists arrive here as rising stars, they already have impeccable technique. What distinguishes them, one from another, involves the selections they choose and how they approach them.

Savitski opened the program with a delightful if idiomatic rendering of Mozart's Sonata in F Major, K. 533/K.495. Melody never became lost in the pianist's impressively articulated performance. Some passages were played more firmly than usually heard, but Savitski retained the composer's infectious charm with engaging ornamentation and fine speedy runs.

The last movement, filled with fetching child-like tunes, Savitski using prancing fingers turned into a music box, while crisp fast notes mimicked a harpsichord sound. Even when melody became overly broad and loud, charm radiated from every note.

Cesar Franck's Prelude, Chorale and Fugue (1884) proved sobering in the pianist's highly romantic and dramatic interpretation. Countless stunning hand crossovers confirmed his fine technical abilities. But eventually the repeated pounding of lower notes detracted.

Works by two Russian composers completed the program, Alexander Scriabin's Sonata No. 7, Op.64 ("White Mass" -- 1911) and Sergey Prokofiev's Sonata No. 7, Op. 83 (1942).

By the time Scriabin composed his sonata, he was in his own introspective world of musical ecstasy.

Dissonance dominated, and no tonic key was in evidence to lend direction or ballast. Savitski projected the atonality faithfully, along with relentless, repeated pounding. The pianist, however, also highlighted the intriguing, innovative harmonies of Scriabin.

Prokofiev offered greater attractions to listeners, especially his brilliant use of rhythms to sustain close attention and interest. Mechanistic pulsations drove the music forward as played by Savitski in the first movement.

Later, catchy syncopations helped create a consuming exuberance. The percussiveness, repeated endlessly at the close, made for a frenzy, perfectly captured in the pianist's playing -- a fitting conclusion to a powerful -- and loud -- performance.

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