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THE ARTS

Pianist's recital embraces Scriabin

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If Garrick Ohlsson played "Chopsticks" on a toy piano, I have no doubt I would be riveted by the performance. Luckily he has performed frequently in Sarasota over the past decade and we have had the opportunity to hear his interpretation of a wide range of repertoire, always very satisfying. Tuesday evening's recital, for more than 1,700 adoring fans, was another success, this time with Ohlsson sharing his own love for the perhaps underappreciated Alexander Scriabin.

The first half of the program, however, featured another Russian, Sergei Prokofiev, with his Sonata No. 2 in D Minor, Op. 14. While clearly from the composer's witty pen, his satirical edge is not yet sharpened here making the experience range from wry commentary and dreamlike sequences in the Andante to just plain fun in the Vivace.

Ohlsson plays everything with full commitment and deep understanding. Both in the Prokofiev and the following Sonata in B Minor, S. 178 by Franz Liszt, there was a remarkable clarity and economy to the phrasing. This ability to bring meaning to the structure and development of themes is all the more important in Liszt's four movements blended without pauses. Through Ohlsson's expressive guidance, we could easily absorb the journey from the opening repeated note with pauses and portentous descending scale through a maze of emotions and treatments, captivating us until the dramatically repeated note with pauses left us hanging at the conclusion.

The next journey, through Scriabin's life and work, started with four of the 12 Preludes written in each key as inspired by Chopin followed by the Sonata No. 2 in G sharp minor (Sonata-Fantasy) Op. 19. These earlier works, played with tasteful discrimination, were followed by a set of later works might as well have come from another world. Scriabin took a revolutionary path toward true atonality and in the otherworldly *Desir*, Op. 57, No. 1, *Two Pieces*, Op 59, and *Etude*, Op. 65, No. 1 Ohlsson demonstrated his knack for compelling musical connection in the absence of familiarity for some audience members. The *Vers la flame*, Op. 72 with its two-note musical mantra serving as a fixed point was

mesmerizing.

Encores of both Chopin and Scriabin brought the audience to its feet shouting their approval and appreciation.

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