

Prats opens Miami Piano Festival with passion and virtuosity

By Lawrence Budmen



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Jorge Luis Prats opened the Miami International Piano Festival with music of Chopin and Scriabin Sunday at the Broward Center.

The Miami International Piano Festival launched its annual Masters Series at the Broward Center on Sunday with marathon afternoon and evening recitals by Jorge Luis Prats. For his evening concert Prats offered a generous program of 24 preludes each by Chopin and Scriabin and a transcription of ballet music by Stravinsky.

Recently signed by Decca, Prats is very much an old-school virtuoso. His highly personal interpretation of the Chopin Preludes balanced cerebral intellect and passionate abandon. This was big-boned, romantic playing that veered to extremes of speed and volume. The famous *Raindrop* Prelude (No.15) was light and breezy, the B minor (No.6) austere. Prats' stormy reading of the moody, tempestuous final D minor Prelude almost sounded Russian, the fierce drama articulated in fiery tones. He appended the *Andante Spianato* and *Grande Polonaise Brillante* to the preludes for an audience-pleasing finale. Prats' plush tone and masterful control enlivened the *Andante Spianato*, the final theme played in clipped fashion rather than the more conventional phrasing. The polonaise was high powered at an unusually fast tempo. Prats' Chopin was not of the salon variety but his playing was undeniably exciting.

The 24 Preludes, Op. 11 of Alexander Scriabin trace the Russian mystic's journey from creator of Chopin-tinged miniatures to Russian romantic and experimental composer. The simple melodic lines of the early preludes are succeeded by miniatures replete with chromaticism and myriad shades of color, almost orchestral in sonority. In the final two pieces, the music becomes wildly unhinged, tonality barely maintained. These rarely played vignettes are fascinating and illuminate the evolution

of a complex pianistic genius. Prats' wide color palette and awesome technique are perfect for Scriabin's distinctive voice. Combining soulful angst and wild abandon, Prats' cycle was a tour de force.

Stravinsky's finger-breaking transcription of three excerpts from the ballet *Petrouchka* held no terrors for Prats. The clanging chords of the Danse Russe restored the music's modernist edge, often smoothed out in performance. Prats' digital dexterity, control and spirited bravura energized the fair scene and he brought subtle pathos to the violence of the scene in the puppet's room.

Following standing ovations from an audience of pianophiles, Prats gave an impromptu lecture on the evolution of key signatures from Bach's *Well Tempered Clavier* through Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin and Scriabin, providing pianistic illustrations of the differences between major and minor keys and the differing ways composers adapted them to their personal compositional voices. The Cuban-born pianist then concluded his virtuosic program with a medley of pieces by his countryman Ernesto Lecuona, played with elegance, rhythmic urgency and idiomatic fervor.

The Miami International Piano Festival Masters' Series continues 8 p.m. Monday at the Broward Center with Claudio Martinez Mehner playing works by Bach, Ligeti and Schubert. 305-935-5115 www.miamipianofest.com (<http://www.miamipianofest.com/>).

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