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Aan: Skrjabin Genootschap

Onderwerp: Recommended Article By Rolf Knap: A Meeting with the Maestro

Hi Skrjabin Genootschap,

Your friend, **Rolf Knap**, has recommended this article entitled '**A Meeting with the Maestro**' to you.

Here is his/her remark:

This maestro is Vladimir Ashkenazy, also a great Scriabin interpretor!

A Meeting with the Maestro

Posted By Fraser Beath McEwing On February 18, 2012 9:22 pm (9:22 pm) In [Featured Articles](#), [News](#)

Being one of his greatest fans, I'd always wanted to meet Vladimir Ashkenazy, principal conductor of the Sydney Symphony and legendary pianist. It happened last week, most unexpectedly...writes Fraser Beath McEwing.



Ashkenazy plays the Steinway in Government House Pic: Giselle Haber

As a member of a small advisory board for the Theme & Variations Foundation, a recently formed organisation to assist young Australian pianists, I had helped plan our launch function at Government House. The Governor, Marie Bashir, who loves piano music, readily agreed to allow us the use of the ballroom to hear a recital by Alexander Gavrylyuk, a young pianist fast

becoming acclaimed among the world's best. He played an electrifying program of Debussy, Liszt, Scriabin and Rachmaninov, which illustrated the outcome of exceptional talent combined with assistance and encouragement in Australia.

Beside the Governor, our other guest of honour was to be Vladimir Ashkenazy – who had conducted the Sydney Symphony with Alexander Gavrylyuk as soloist on several occasions.

Each advisory board member was allocated a task for the event. I was to go to the gatehouse and check off names as the guests arrived by car. Necessary but boring, I thought, as I walked with my wife Michelle towards the gates that would open at 6.30. On the other side of the gates a small, lone figure was walking towards us dressed in a black suit over a white skivvy. We met on either side of the ornate gates.

“Good evening Mr Ashkenazy,” I said. “You seem to be lost.”

“My wife and I are supposed to be here tonight but she is not well; has a terrible cold.” He gave a demonstration cough. “Luckily, I didn't get it – yet anyway. I thought I would walk over here from the hotel to say sorry we can't make it. I need to get back to look after her.”

Under the stern gaze of the security guard, I opened the side gate and let Mr Ashkenazy in, where I shook a hand that had produced some of the most sublime playing since the piano was invented.

“There is something I always wanted to tell you if ever I got the chance,” I said. “I remember exactly where I was the day I heard your recording of the Rachmaninov third piano concerto. You played the first movement cadenza slowly. I heard notes and harmonies in there for the first time.”



Fraser Beath
McEwing

“Well actually that was the second recording. I recorded it earlier, in the sixties, but back then everybody played the cadenza at full speed. I think I was the first one to play it slowly. Now, of course, everybody plays it slowly. You know, Rachmaninov didn’t mind how anybody played his music. He was not a confident composer. He wrote two cadenzas for the concerto, a long one and a short one. He’d tell people to choose.”

“Do you still play?” I asked thinking, incorrectly, that I knew the answer.

“Oh yes, I practice every day. But at my stage in life I don’t want to play solo recitals. There are plenty of people to do that. You’re very isolated out there on a platform, very exposed. I like to be with an orchestra, musicians around me, sharing a performance. I do sometimes play recitals, but for two pianos with my son. He’s a pianist, you know. We enjoy that.”

“I was at the opera house the other night when your score fell off your music stand,” I said, “and a lady cellist picked it up and put it back for you. Did you send her a red rose?”

“No,” he laughed, “that is not how you thank a lady. This is how you thank a lady.” He lifted Michelle’s hand and kissed it. “In any case,” he added, “it didn’t matter if the score was on the floor. I knew the music.”

He said he hoped to conduct in Armenia later this year or early

next. “My teacher for many years was Armenian,” he said reflectively. “Such terrible things are happening in that part of the world.”

We chatted about the friendship between Rachmaninov and Horowitz.

“They used to play for each other. Rachmaninov used to tell Horowitz that he was the better pianist, but that wasn’t true. Horowitz was good with the fingers but Rachmaninov was better, and he had it up here”. He tapped his white hair.

“Mr Ashkenazy, I know you need to get back to your wife,” I said, “but we would greatly appreciate it if you could just walk into Government House and say hello.”

“Will the lady be there? I’d like to apologise to her.”

“No the Governor isn’t due for half an hour or so and I’m sure nobody will expect you to stay, but just a quick appearance would be wonderful.”

“Okay,” he said, smiling, and we shook hands again.

He continued his walk past the elegant gardens, softened by twilight, to the grand sandstone portico of Government House. A small figure in the landscape, but a giant in the world of classical music.

Article taken from J-Wire - <http://www.jwire.com.au>