

Classical guitarist Anton Baranov is golden at Oberlin (October 14)

by Jarrett Hoffman



Standing ovations can be awkward. A few people will stand, and gradually the rest of the audience will follow suit, preferring to comply but almost reluctant to do it.

You might not find a more genuine standing ovation than the one classical guitarist Anton Baranov received last Thursday night, October 14, in Oberlin's Kulas Recital Hall. Following his dazzling program, performed from memory, the whole room was immediately up

out of their seats for what was an unforgettable concert, one of the best guest performances Oberlin has seen in recent memory.

Baranov's playing was pure magic. So subtle were his timing and touch—from gentle grazes of the fingers to more deliberate plucks—that it seemed like a joke to think that the music he played could be represented by marks on a page. Not that it felt improvised. Rather, it seemed to simply, stunningly exist, like a room of gold discovered in an Egyptian tomb. It added to the sense of wonder that he only left the stage for intermission and before his encore.

Excerpts from Yuri Smirnov's *Images of Saint-Petersburg* seemed close to the heart for Baranov. Speaking from the stage, the guitarist called the fellow Russian a friend "despite the age difference" (Baranov is 30, Smirnov 90). In "Lullaby," Baranov's playing was full of shadow and melancholy. It felt like pure emotion rather than performance. He chased it with the excellent "Pushkin Waltz," named after the Russian poet, and "Romance," where his slides and vibrato were expressive to the bone.

Providing a rollicking end to the first half was the more experimental *Sonata No. 4, "Italiana,"* by Guido Santórsola. Capped off by explosive strumming, the closing "Alla

Tarantella” also saw Baranov zip through chromatic passages, spank the strings, and slap different parts of the guitar, producing unique sounds.

Baranov had to come up with something really outstanding to end the program. He turned to what he called “one of the greatest pieces for guitar:” Miguel Llobet’s *Variaciones sobre un tema de Sor*, Op. 15. Baranov handled the theme’s beautiful polyphony expertly, giving each voice its own spirit. He let loose with his tricks in the variations, his fingers evoking the thousand legs of a speedy insect in his fast, precise strumming. The ninth variation, “for the left hand only,” provided the water-cooler moment of the evening, Baranov’s left hand zooming up and down the strings, no sweat.

Blowing his floppy hair out of his eyes as he returned to the stage, Baranov gave the Kulas audience a lovely short encore by Marc Lamberg. While it didn’t quite live up to the closer, as often is the case with encores, it was one last taste of incredible musicianship from Baranov before he continued with his 50-city tour—part of winning the Guitar Foundation of America International Concert Artist Competition last year. He’s now blazed onward from Northeast Ohio, but his music surely still echoes in the minds of all who heard him.

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