

Tri-C Classical Piano Series: Stanislav Khristenko at CMA (March 6)

by Daniel Hathaway



Tri-C's excellent Classical Piano Series brought 2013 Cleveland International Piano Competition gold medalist Stanislav Khristenko back to Cleveland for the 3rd and final recital of its 9th season. His captivating program of music by Sergei Rachmaninoff, Samuel Barber, Ernest Bloch, and Igor Stravinsky drew a sizeable crowd to Gartner Auditorium on Sunday afternoon, March 6.

For a series sponsored by an educational institution, it was surprising that Cuyahoga Community College gave only minimal information about Khristenko's repertoire in the printed program — no program notes, not even the number and names of the movements of the four big pieces he played.

It might have been helpful for what appeared to be a broad audience to know that the cash-starved Rachmaninoff composed his *Moments musicaux*, Op. 16 as a potboiler during two months late in 1896. And that each of its six movements focuses on a traditional musical form, including the nocturne, the song without words, the barcarolle, the étude, and the theme and variations.

Khristenko delineated the individual character of the pieces masterfully, which range from nostalgic reverie to agitated virtuosity, and are laced through with some wild harmonic sequences and brooding chorales. He played the triumphal, big-handed "Maestoso" that closes the set with vehemence and hefty tone.

Samuel Barber wrote his *Sonata* in 1949 for the 25th-anniversary meeting of the [League of Composers](#), where at the composer's behest it was played by Vladimir Horowitz. On Sunday, Stanislav Khristenko returned to the stage and began the big, brash first movement before the applause had subsided. He played its scherzo-like second

movement, an urbane and witty perpetual motion exercise, with clean brilliance, and its third movement aria (a theme over a left-hand ostinato) with lyrical feeling. The finale, a rhythmically tricky toccata which develops into a fugue, ends with a bravura gesture that Khristenko dashed off with hearty glee.

The audience returned after intermission to hear an underperformed work with Cleveland connections. Speaking to the audience, Khristenko noted that Ernest Bloch wrote his *Poems of the Sea* in 1922 in Cleveland and in Maine, during his brief tenure as president of the Cleveland Institute of Music. Based on a Walt Whitman fragment, the three movements — *Waves*, *Chanty*, and *At Sea* — are charming musical snapshots that Khristenko put across vividly. *Chanty* begins with a little modal tune Bloch spikes with a few vinegary cross-relations. *At Sea* conjures up images of a sailor's hornpipe, but ends with big gestures and open fifth chords.

Stanislav Khristenko ended his recital with an ebullient performance of Igor Stravinsky's *Three Movements from Petrushka* in which his touch — and the sound emanating from the Steinway — ranged from brittle-brilliant to shimmering to thunderous. Though Khristenko's performance was a bit overdone (this is all about a puppet show, after all), the pianist sent the audience off with a thrilling piece of showmanship. They wouldn't leave, however, without an encore, so Khristenko obliged them with a beautifully-shaped performance of Franz Liszt's arrangement of Robert Schumann's "Widmung" from *Myrthen*, Op. 25.

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