

Pianist Antonio Pompa-Baldi on Music from the Western Reserve (Feb. 11)

by Daniel Hathaway



Antonio Pompa-Baldi's piano recital on Sunday afternoon, February 11 on the Music From the Western Reserve series at Christ Episcopal Church in Hudson checked all the boxes on the Perfect Sunday Afternoon Concert scorecard. It lasted just over an hour, visited some unusual repertoire in varying styles, let the music speak for itself without extraneous commentary from the

stage, and was brilliantly performed, to boot.

Pompa-Baldi began with a strong, clear performance of Johann Nepomuk Hummel's *Sonata No. 2*, Op. 13. A contemporary of Beethoven and a student both of Haydn and Mozart, Hummel has largely been ignored in our times except for a trumpet concerto. This E-flat Major work is sturdy, attractive, and requires enough virtuosity to give an audience an immediate sense of the prowess of the performer. Pompa-Baldi highlighted its dramatic qualities while establishing his technical creds from the outset.

Franz Liszt embarked on an ambitious project to compose etudes in all 24 major and minor keys but — long story short — only completed a dozen of them in the natural and flat keys. The Russian pianist-composer Sergei Lyapunov completed the set with his own dozen in the sharp keys, dedicating the last to the memory of Liszt.

Pompa-Baldi followed the Hummel Sonata with Lyapunov's *Transcendental Etude No. 12*, a dark, rumbly, moody piece dizzy with notes that Liszt might have written himself, except that Lyapunov's enjoys more of a sense of clarity. Again, Pompa-Baldi played with strength and power, yet always with control.

Among the pianist's 20 CDs is *The Rascal and the Sparrow*, a collection of piano elaborations by Roberto Piana of Edith Piaf songs, along with Pompa-Baldi's own arrangements of songs by Francis Poulenc. Poulenc and Piaf may never have met, but his music shares many similarities with the songs of the great chanteuse.

Pompa-Baldi made an *entremet* out of five tracks from the CD, providing a delightful change of pace at this point in his program. Poulenc's *Improvisation N. 15 "Homage à Edith Piaf* and *Les Chemins de l'Amour* fit nicely among Piana's versions of *La Vie en Rose*, *Je sais comment*, and *Hymne à l'Amour*, and the pianist played them with easy grace.

The program ended with Nikolai Medtner's *Sonata Tragica*, Op. 39, No. 5, written the year before the composer self-exiled from Russia and entered a period in his life that could aptly be labeled tragic. The piece makes a strong impression — a striking series of chords appears twice — and Pompa-Baldi put it across boldly, even allowing himself a bit of pianistic excess toward the end.

As a gentle, expressive encore, Antonio Pompa-Baldi sent the audience out with a Kabalevsky *Nocturne*.

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