

**Rocky River Chamber Music Society:  
Arsentiy Kharitonov, piano (Nov. 15)**

by Daniel Hathaway



Russian pianist Arsentiy Kharitonov played the second concert in the Rocky River Chamber Music Society Series on Monday evening, November 15, not in the Society's home venue — West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church — but at Lakewood Congregational Church, due to COVID-19 concerns. I watched the recital, a

hybrid event with in-person attendance permitted, via the live stream.

Unlike most concert pianists, who seem to have taken to the keyboard while they were still learning to walk, Kharitonov only began his studies at the age of 16. But he plays with such naturalness and easy virtuosity that you'd never imagine he came late to the party.

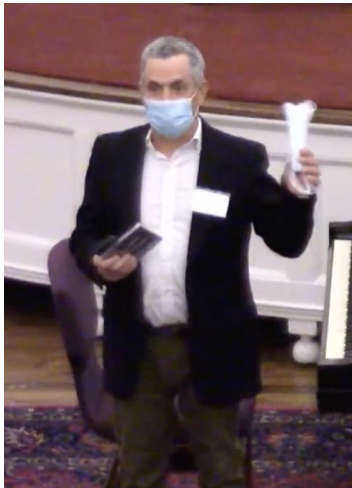
Wisely altering the order of his first two works, Kharitonov swapped the Busoni arrangement of J.S. Bach's *Chaconne* with Schubert's *Klavierstucke No. 1*, a decision that allowed both pianist and audience the opportunity to adjust to the instrument and the room before overheating the musical rhetoric with a bombastic 19th century arrangement.

The Schubert was lyrical and listenable, the Bach-Busoni completely overwrought, but its more outrageous gestures were mitigated to some extent by the good taste of the pianist. Robert Schumann's *Arabesque* and Johann Strauss' *Soiree de Vienne* brought a lightness of spirit to the rest of the first half.

Following an intermission, Kharitonov played another transcription — Alexander Siloti’s arrangement of J.S. Bach’s organ *Präludium in g*, BWV 535, one of some 200 the Russian pianist made during his career. In Kharitonov’s fingers, the piece sounded completely idiomatic on the piano.



Arsentiy Kharitonov finished his program with a handful of Scriabin and Rachmaninoff preludes and Etudes-Tableau, playing with colorful tone and sensitive phrasing. If I’m sounding vague here, those pieces weren’t identified in the live stream, and, as happens so frequently with these broadcasts, verbal commentary was largely off mic and incomprehensible.



A thought-provoking moment preceded the concert when RRCMS board member and Cleveland Orchestra clarinetist Daniel McKelway offered face masks to any attendees who needed them. He noted that a member of the wind section of the Orchestra had tested positive for COVID-19 last week, which led to the cancellation of two concerts.

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