



Danbury, CT
October 26, 2009

Rearranged gems sparkle at piano recital in Newtown

By Jan Stribula

NEWTOWN--Gifted young Daria Rabotkina gave glittering renditions of many familiar works transcribed for piano in her Sunday recital earlier this month at Edmond Town Hall.

Everyone was warmly welcomed in from a chilly autumn afternoon by a chamber ensemble playing in the lobby and Newtown Friends of Music President Ellen Parella on the stage.

Rabotkina's program, on Oct. 18, included many transcriptions by Ferruccio Busoni (1866 - 1924), a prolific arranger of other peoples' music. But she chose to open with her own reverential treatment of Johann Sebastian Bach's "Ricercar a 3." Almost as if in a trance, Rabotkina was gazing upward as she added her subtle and sensitive touches to the comfort music.

Drawing deeper from her emotional wellspring, she continued with Busoni's transcriptions of Bach's "Chorale Prelude Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland" and "Chaconne in D minor." The abundant energy of the arrangements breathed new life into Bach, while maintaining the essence of a baroque organ. With her dramatic presence and total focus, Rabotkina managed to transcend the usual world of Bach, as we know it.

No longer in a trance, she was erupting in Busoni's "Variations and Fugue on Chopin's Prelude in C minor, Op. 22." Enlivening and enriching each variation, she never lost the sense of the original theme.

Perhaps it's my imagination, but sporting a new shorter hairdo, Rabotkina seemed to enjoy adding extra body language into her performance, unencumbered by stray strands.

After intermission, she turned to music from her Russian homeland composed by iconoclastic Sergei Prokofiev (1891 - 1953). Two extremely difficult "Etudes for piano, Op. 2" were short and semi-sweet, full of fury and restrained but brilliant outbursts.

It's amazing how the public's perception of music changes over time. When Prokofiev composed "Romeo and Juliet" about 75 years ago, it was met with intense criticism: artistic, political, and choreographic. The Kirov Ballet declared it undanceable. Last week when I told my daughter Laura that I was going to hear it, she said it should be good and started singing the tune from "Dance of the Knights."

Rabotkina ended her program with Prokofiev's piano reduction "Ten pieces from Romeo and Juliet, Op. 75," her left hand often lurking while her right hand was playful. The "Montagues and Capulets" unrelenting pseudo-pompous cadence was primitive and grotesque. Juliet was portrayed as a scampering little girl entering adolescence, with glimpses of the impending doom. With confidence and authority, Rabotkina developed rising tensions and agitation for the drama, but unlike Shakespeare, the story ended with some glimmers of hope.

For an encore, she played a cute ragtime ditty that served as just the right tonic for all the preceding tragedy, with "Pork and Beans" by stride pianist Luckey Roberts.