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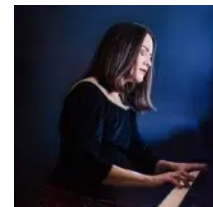
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The Thoughtful Muse: A Recital by Pianist Daria Rabotkina

by [Dr. Gary Lemco](#)

[February 11, 2020](#)





Daria Rabotkina

In a letter to me some years ago, composer Morton Gould remarked that writing a new composition lay “fraught with danger — that of being judged less on its own merits than by an amalgam of its influences.” Such might have been the case for pianist Daria Rabotkina’s performance of the *Sonata in B-flat Minor* (1975) of American composer Paul Aurandt, given Sunday, February 9 at the Hammer Theatre, in San Jose under the auspices of the Steinway Society the Bay Area. Certainly, Aurandt follows Richard Addinsell’s *Warsaw Concerto* in its dramatic, if Hollywood-compressed, attempt to imitate the grand Russian style. Yet Ms. Rabotkina’s sincerity and singular keyboard prowess managed to convince us that this bravura essay in Neo-Romantic temperament had moments of singular merit.

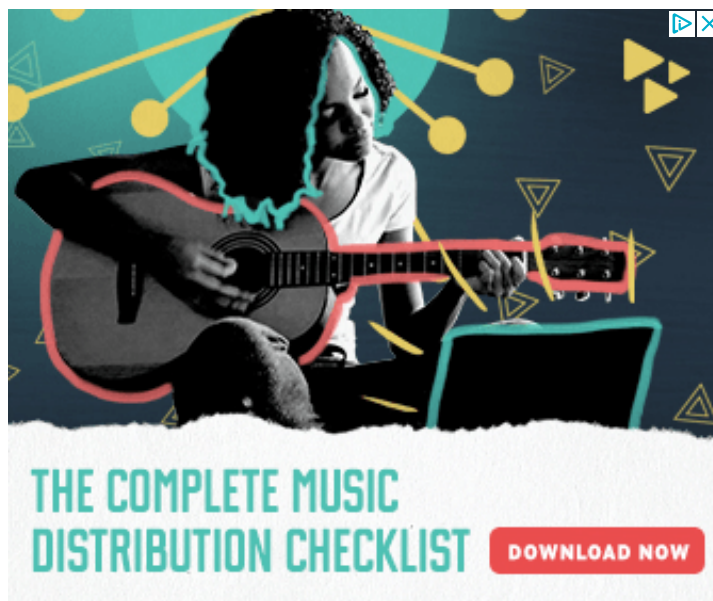
Daria Rabotkina, a graduate of the Kazan State Conservatory and a distinguished pupil of Vladimir Feltsman, exhibited an impressive yet genteel presence on stage. She is a highly concentrated and focused performer who exacts a bold intensity from the pieces she champions, and she exhibited a muscular style that still stopped short of percussive pounding and managed a lyric, singing tone. Rabotkina opened her program with four of Schubert’s 1828 *Moments musicaux D. 780* — pieces meant for gifted amateurs that suggest Romantic sentiment and charm. The *No. 2 in A-flat Major* proffered a 9/8 dotted-rhythm *siciliano* in rondo form and was sadly wistful in its moments in D-flat Major and the ever-tragic key of F-sharp minor. The sudden emerging *fortissimo* paroxysm of pain seemed to signify the desperate raising of an arm against fate. The familiar *Air Russe in F minor* (1823) seemed like a song without words, especially in its middle section in A-flat, with delicacy and gentle arioso marking its symmetrical progression. Skipping the Bach-like *No. 4*, Rabotkina went directly to the *Allegro vivace* of *No. 5 in F Minor*, a pungent clash of one long and two short notes. The middle section altered the texture while retaining the dactyl pattern — one long G-flat succeeded by short F-sharp and B, an effect piquant and even disturbing in its sudden silence. The expressive last piece, the *No. 6 in A-flat Major*, said farewell through a series of key shifts and modal harmonies rendered with poetic sensitivity.

The monumental *Piano Sonata No. 32 in C Minor, Op. 111* (1822) by Beethoven filled out the first half of the program. The storm-wrought *Maestoso* first movement and the *Adagio molto semplice e cantabile* second movement comprise a sound world unique in music, perhaps transcending “music,” as such. Rabotkina endowed the first movement’s fateful three notes with both menace and resolve. The manic obsessive pattern “threatened” to become a fugue subject, but settled for gloomy transformations, some even gentle and mysterious. This was followed by the marvel of the *Arietta* in its disarming simplicity and ripe for Beethoven’s intense pulverizing of its elements to a degree that the atonalists, Schoenberg and Webern,

would admire. The first three variants ceded to the fourth that marks the second half of the movement, marked by gliding, double trills and a singular compression of cascading affects. This performance, along with the later sonata by Aurandt, would glean from the audience the epithet, “spellbinding.”

The final moments of the recital came in the form of American composer Charles Tomlinson’s Griffes’ excerpts from his *Roman Sketches, Op. 7* (1916), music that has had the term “impressionistic” inevitably attached to its evocative tone-pictures. Rabotkina selected *The Fountain of the Acqua Paola* and *Clouds* as her vehicles for color effects. Similar to the water music of Liszt and Ravel, that of Griffes utilizes cross-rhythms and high registers to apply streaks of light that filter through the misty haze. At its more intense moments, we might have had Ezekiel’s “voice like that of many waters” arching into our midst. No less beguiling to our ears, *Clouds* invoked moments of bitonality set in the jagged metrics of 7/4 to expand the keyboard’s sense of its “symphonic” capabilities. Under the masterful hands of Ms. Rabotkina, Griffes’ music, as had his kindred composers this afternoon, received thoughtful, colorful, and eminently arresting performances of the highest order.

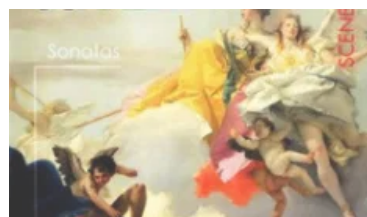
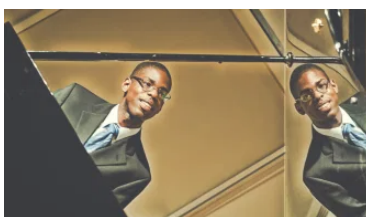
—Gary Lemco



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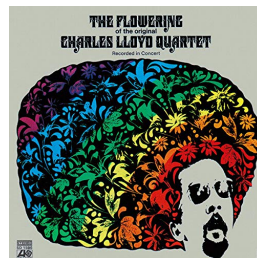
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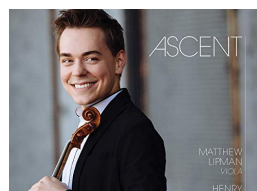
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