

# Pianist strives to find the music's poetry

## classical

### Misha Dacic at the Golandsky Piano Festival

**When:** 8 p.m. Monday

**Where:** Taplin Auditorium, Fine Hall, Princeton University campus, Ivy Lane and Washington Road, Princeton

**How much:** \$25; call (877) 343-3434 or visit golandskyinstitute.org

BY BRADLEY BAMBARGER  
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Born in Serbia 30 years ago, pianist Misha Dacic has the Eastern European features, lank hair and spidery fingers that spur critics to play up his likeness to old portraits of the original Romantic piano star, Franz Liszt.

But Dacic has spent his adult years in Italy and Miami. He is as drawn to the tango as he is to Liszt. No matter the music, he loves uncommon repertoire and loathes one-size-fits-all virtuosity.

"Pianists should be vessels for the composer, of course, but they should not be reproducing machines," Dacic says. "To me, a musician's personality should inflect the music. Otherwise, every player would sound the same, and there is far too much of that already."

Dacic returns to Princeton's intimate Taplin Auditorium on Monday as part of the Golandsky International Piano Festival, which he first played in 2004. His program will include Schumann's *Humoreske* and a dozen Rachmaninoff miniatures that are rarely heard one after another.

Such Schumann works as "Kreisleriana" and "Fantasy" are favorites of the virtuoso repertoire, but Dacic feels a need "to play the less well-known works by well-known composers," he says. "Schumann was a famous manic-depressive, and the 'Humoreske' has both elements, the laughing and crying."

Although Dacic adores the Latin culture of south Miami, if the pianist "had to choose a favorite composer, it would be Rachmaninoff," he says. "I feel a kinship to its melancholy. When I hear Rachmaninoff's music, it sounds like home to me."

Dacic reveres the recordings of Rachmaninoff's own playing, but Vladimir Horowitz remains special for him: "I've listened to his final recording for 15 years now, and I'm still amazed by it. But it's impossible to break down what I like about it. It's so many things at once."

Dacic left his home country at



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age 17 to study in Italy with Lazar Berman, another late pianist famed among knowing Russophiles. When teaching, Berman avoided mechanics for poetry. Dacic recalls that after he would first play a piece for him, Berman "often sent me to museums, telling me to see this painting or that sculpture before I returned to play it again."

Now finishing his master's degree at Florida International University, Dacic has become a fixture at the Miami International Piano Festival. An upcoming DVD from VAI captures his recent performances there, including the Rachmaninoff sequence he will play in Princeton.

Beyond Horowitz, another of Dacic's favorite pianists is the Cuban Jorge Luis Prats, who opens the Golandsky Festival on Sunday. Now occasional duet partners, they met at a soiree in Miami.

"I opened the door to a party a few years ago, and I heard this god-like playing — it was Jorge," Dacic recalls. "He played until 5 a.m., everything from Cuban music like LeCuona to Godowsky transcriptions. Only music comes out of him, nothing else. It's raw individuality, wonderful."

After the recitals by Prats and Dacic, the week-long Golandsky Fest continues with chamber music Tuesday and contemporary music Thursday. Golandsky favorite Ilya Itin returns July 18 with Beethoven and Prokofiev, and elegant jazz stylist Bill Charlap closes the festival on July 19.

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