

A Memorable Performance by a Russian Pianist

Alejandro Fernández / Music Critic
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The Russian Pianist Ilya Itin won over the audience with his performance of works by Haydn, Prokofiev and Beethoven. The most notable performance of the evening was the Sonata #8.

As he did 11 years ago in Monterrey at his first recital in Mexico, the Russian artist Ilya Itin exhibited pianistic perfection in the 4th concert of the 14th Festival Internacional de Piano Sala Beethoven. As in his previous appearance in 1996—when he played in Parnassus shortly after receiving honors at the prestigious international competition in Leeds Itin produced a Wednesday night program full of contrasts. Chopin and Messiaen gave way to Haydn and Beethoven with a repeat performance of Prokofiev, his specialty. Most notable was his imposing performance of the Russian composer's "Sonata No. 8." Itin's achievement with this piece is most remarkable given its extreme technical challenges. No detail was lost from among the dense technical and expressive complexity that characterizes the thorniest of Prokofiev's "war sonatas." From beginning to end the audience was able to admire Itin's supremely confident finger work, the depth of his interpretation and the considerable expressiveness manifest in the high-voltage virtuosity.

After hearing Prokofiev's eighth sonata we can better appreciate the magnificent contrast with the opening piece, Haydn's Variations in F minor, where Itin demonstrated virtuosity of another type. Itin showed remarkable elegance and an extremely delicate "toucher". In perfect classical style, Itin clearly articulated the most exquisite details of a refined musical language. His interpretation of Beethoven's tortured Sonata No. 23 ("Appassionata") was surprising in its rigor and severity, and approached with prodigious richness from the very beginning. Characterized by intense, energetically struck notes, bold chords and emphatic arpeggios, the piece was played convulsively and with mounting agitation.

In the *Andante con Moto* movement Itin underscored the most cantabile chords, a short pause in the dramatic rush which concluded with the 3rd movement's almost overwhelming weight of expression. This demonstration of strength was followed by a superb performance of Franz Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz*, a treat not in the original program. With his interpretation of this heated piece, the maestro concluded the evening's performance to the sound of furious applause from the standing audience.