

An Evening of Piano Concertos Featured Four Artists From The Golandsky Institute

Nancy Plum | July 23, 2014

For eleven years, a musical treasure has been taking place in Princeton in the summer. The Golandsky Institute has been presenting a symposium and International Piano Festival each summer, training artists in a specific technique known as the Taubman Approach, which develops virtuosity while preventing the injuries affecting highly-accomplished players. As part of the symposium, the Institute has presented public concerts to show off the faculty and talented students.

With the generosity of William and Judith Scheide, the Golandsky Institute took a journey through the history of the piano concerto in a performance last week at Richardson Auditorium. Last Thursday night's "Scheide Concerto Evening," offered two of the Institute's long-time faculty members and two other talented participants in the Institute in four concerti spanning 200 years. Prominently featured were works by two of the biggest names in 18th-century keyboard music — Johann Sebastian Bach, who transcribed virtuosic works for other instruments to the keyboard; and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, who took the keyboard concerto form to new heights with an instrument that was still evolving.

Father Seán Duggan, a performance expert on the music of Bach, paid tribute to the hosts of the evening Bach's Keyboard Concerto in E Major a work originally for harpsichord and which was based on Bach cantatas first recorded by William Scheide with the Bach Aria Group. Concerti in Bach's time were beginning to take the shape known today, with keyboard concerti characterized by virtuoso requirements usually seen from string instruments. Performing this concerto on a modern piano created a more powerful interpretation than Bach would have imagined, but Father Duggan's playing was every bit as clean and precise as Bach would have expected. With graceful mordents and trills, Father Duggan well handled the virtuosity required of the work, especially in the extremely quick third movement. Conductor Mark Laycock kept the accompanying orchestra appropriately in the background, building tension between the strings and keyboard and elegantly bringing the music down to nothing to close the second movement Siciliano.

The other Golandsky faculty member featured in this concerto evening was Ilya Itin, a pianist with facility in all centuries of music. By Mozart's time, the concerto placed certain expectations on the performer in terms of structure, and in Mozart's case, melody. Mr. Itin's performance of Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 12 in A Major used similar orchestration to the Bach Concerto, but the lower strings in particular served a very different role, and all orchestral parts were responsible for line and drama. Mr. Itin perfectly matched the orchestral colors of the opening introduction and showed that he was capable of both a delicate touch and a forceful style within a graceful framework. The dialog between pianist and ensemble was exact, and Mozart's humor was well brought out in the third movement interplay among the players.

Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich composed for a piano that was capable of conveying a full range of emotions and musical styles. An experiment by Shostakovich in neo-Baroque orchestration, Concerto in C minor for Piano, Trumpet and String Orchestra added the color of a brass instrument to the light instrumental character, with Mr. Itin again playing solo piano. The first movement seemed to incorporate a Russian folk tale, with a walking bass line and a musical atmosphere that was not as dense as other Shostakovich works. The violins of the New Jersey Symphony provided mournful tunes in the second movement, but with lean playing to accompany the Mr. Itin's pounding left hand in the keyboard part.

The combined third and fourth movements were the most dramatic of the concerto, with the most virtuosic requirements of the soloist, and more technically demanding playing required of all the musicians. Shostakovich's humor could be heard in the *col legno* playing from the strings, while Mr. Laycock kept the musical action moving right along. Shostakovich seemed to throw everything but the kitchen sink into these two combined movements, and the players of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, as well as Mr. Itin, had it all well in hand.

The two Golandsky faculty members were joined by two younger members of the Institute in the closing work of the concert: Bach's Concerto for Four Pianos in A Minor. Originally scored for four harpsichords, this work was a transcription of a work by Antonio Vivaldi in its day, and in Thursday's concerto showed all four players to be of equal artistry. Nathan Grabow and Sakura Myers both clearly have futures as concert pianists, and as the melodic material traveled among the keyboards, all players knew their roles as either featured soloists or harmonic background. Ms. Myers in particular showed a great deal of style at the keyboard as the concert closed with typically Vivaldi harmonic drive and intensity.