

The Washington Post

Monday, November 17, 2008

PERFORMING ARTS

Daria Rabotkina

Daria Rabotkina is a young pianist with clearly prodigious musical gifts. She played a ferocious all-Russian program at the Kennedy Center Terrace Theater on Saturday, following Nikolai Miaskovsky's seldom heard Sonata No. 2 in F-sharp Minor, Op. 13, and Rachmaninoff's "Etude-tableau" in A Minor, Op. 39, No. 2, along with three of the four early Op. 2 Etudes by Prokofiev and Tchaikovsky's Grand Sonata in G, Op. 37. The concert was part of the Washington Performing Arts Society's Hayes Series, spotlighting emerging talents.

Such music as Rabotkina presented Saturday calls for outrageously challenging technical feats. And she rose to the occasion, launching a virtual stampede of notes at high velocity, from start to finish, through every piece. Crouching like a mad scientist -- the music demanded whole-body language -- she sounded a continual torrent of fortes with seeming effortlessness.

Calling forth visions of the plague, the medieval "Dies Irae" chant threaded by turns blatantly and slyly through much of the music offered. Legions of composers have used it, but with the afternoon's works, it was continually reinforced in melancholic Slavic overtones, these resonating with the depth of a Russian bass. Rabotkina missed none of this motif's ominous implications, yet she remained sensitive to each composer's individual subtleties in expressing it, pounding out Miaskovsky's version, which reaches its climax in a lethally potent fugue, and revealing all the reflective innuendoes that Rachmaninoff called for in his pondering fantasy. The Prokofiev was driven by hammered strokes in incessant fury. In the Tchaikovsky, an epic as endless as the Russian steppes, Rabotkina's playing remained controlled throughout; yet the composer hinted at the morbid chant with the extremes of Hieronymus Bosch's lurid canvases.

In a repertoire as high-decibel as Rabotkina's, however, some listeners begin to long for the more lyrical resources of the Steinway grand on the stage. Such a moment came only with the final blissfully rendered encore. But the audience loved the display, calling her back many times and trying for more.

-- [Cecelia Porter](#)