

March 19, 2018

Hungarian pianist displays revelatory artistry in SoFla debut

By Lawrence Budmen



The newly reconfigured Colony Theater in Miami Beach made a fine showcase for the South Florida debut of Hungarian pianist Zoltan Fejérvári for the Miami International Piano Festival's Discovery Series on Sunday night.

With three rows of seats removed and new seating on the side, the audience now enters by walking up onto the stage and down a small ramp into the hall's main seating area. The stage has been extended and thrust forward, resulting in a more intimate performing space. On first hearing, the acoustic seemed improved with keyboard resonance clearer and more immediate.

Fejérvári, who counts pianist András Schiff among his mentors, proved the kind of true "discovery" this series was meant to display. The young pianist and chamber music instructor at Budapest's Liszt Academy of Music evidenced dazzling technique that can rank with the best piano virtuosos and his

interpretive instincts were consistently revelatory. He imbued even the most overt display pieces with subtlety and aristocratic insight.

In Bach's English Suite in G minor, Fejérvári managed to emulate harpsichord-like registrations on a modern Steinway. The opening Prelude was lithe and Fejérvári brought out the inner voices of the austere Allemande. There was transparent precision in the rapid figurations of the Courante. The Sarabande, the score's heart, is one of Bach's most soulful instrumental creations. The pianist's subtle detailing of variegated dynamics was infused with a touch of poetry. Fejérvári's wonderfully quirky hesitations and angular phrasings gave distinctive personality to the two gavottes. Fugal lines in the concluding Gigue emerged with clarity at an unusually brisk clip.

Fejérvári turned full-blooded romantic for Schumann's Sonata in G minor. In the first movement, huge contrasts of tempo and volume held sway. Schumann instructs the pianist to play "still faster" in the coda and Fejérvári captured the devilish fantasy of those closing pages.

The calm and serene Andantino has its genesis in Schumann's vocal lieder. Here Fejérvári achieved a quiet and contemplative aura by unusually judicious utilization of the piano's soft pedal. He realized both the fierce and playful qualities of the Scherzo, more a



Paganini-like caprice for the keyboard. There was fine coloration in a fleet reading of the Rondo-Presto with Schumann's split musical personality projected richly.

Fejérvári turned to bravura showpieces for the program's second half. The percussive power and deliberate pauses of the opening chords in Chopin's Scherzo No. 1 in B minor seemed almost shocking and the fluid, high-voltage reading was definitely not the Chopin of prettified salon vignettes. If Fejérvári's Chopin was Lisztian, he infused Liszt's Ballade No. 2 in B minor with a song-like romance. The opening rumblings in the left hand, as if from the lower depths, were given space and the big-boned volleys were powerful indeed.

The tritone opening of Liszt's *Après un lecture de Dante* (Dante Sonata) was

revolutionary in its day. Fejérvári managed to restore the adventure and modernity to the score. He gave full vent to the music's virtuosic qualities while bringing dramatic coherence and surprising moments of contrasting beauty and even elegance amid the bombastic thunder.

Responding to repeated bravos and cheers, Fejérvári told the audience that he was not used to playing for such enthusiastic listeners. His encore of Schubert's Impromptu in G flat Major was almost operatic in singing line and softly tinted glow. This is a pianist who needs to be heard more frequently in American concert halls.

ZOLTÁN FEJÉRVÁRI
PIANIST

The Gazette

May 11, 2017

Europe owns the winners' circle at CMIM piano competition

By Arthur Kaptainis



Hungary's Zoltán Fejérvári won first prize in the 15th Concours musical international de Montréal after performing a bracing account of Bartók's Third Piano Concerto.

Zoltán Fejérvári, 30, a Hungarian schooled largely in the Franz Liszt Academy of his native Budapest, has won first prize in the 15th Concours musical international de Montréal. He was followed by two Italians in a final round that included another European, two South Koreans and no contestants from the Americas.

Fejérvári leaves town with the \$30,000 first prize offered by the city of Montreal and the \$50,000 Joseph Rouleau Career

Development Grant funded by the Azrieli Foundation. His victory was based on a bracing account of the Third Piano Concerto of his compatriot Béla Bartók, a relatively rare bird on the competition circuit.

Winner of the second prize is Giuseppe Guarrera, a 25-year-old trained partly in Berlin. His takeaway for a robust and forward-moving performance of Tchaikovsky's much more familiar Piano



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Concerto No. 1 is \$15,000, courtesy of Québecor.

Third prize goes to Stefano Andreatta, also 25, who ably contrasted the intimate and extrovert elements of Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 2. While not exactly a rarity, this 22-minute fantasy is seldom heard in competitions. Andreatta earns \$10,000 from Stingray Classica.

The finals took place Tuesday and Wednesday in the Maison symphonique with the demonstrably excellent OSM under Claus Peter Flor, who encouraged positive rather than deferential accompaniments. Pinpoint interplay with the woodwinds certainly did not hurt Fejérvári in the first two movements of the Bartók.

Unranked finalists (there is no fourth, fifth or sixth prize) did not disgrace themselves. Jinyung Park, 21, produced a refined if sometimes languorous performance of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2. If there were an award for delicate slow movements, he would surely be considered.

His fellow South Korean Yejin Noh, 30, played brilliantly and with much rhythmic inflection in Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1. Unfortunately, her performance included an emphatic wrong note in the first cadenza and a memory lapse later in the opening movement. She was the only female to reach the Maison symphonique round.

The other unranked finalist was Albert Cano Smit, 20, who was playing under the flags of both Spain and the Netherlands despite his Swiss birth. He elicited many beauties from Brahms's Piano Concerto No. 1, but stumbled early and often in this majestic score. Whatever his standing, the youngest contestant in the finals established himself as an artist to watch with a thoughtful semifinal recital last Saturday.

Keep in mind that the final round with orchestra was in essence a new competition. The nine judges (who are not allowed to confer with each other) ranked the concerto performances 1 to 6. The best possible score was 9, the worst 54.

All very sanitary, although it is conceivable that judges might

consciously or unconsciously bear prior achievement in mind when ranking the concerto outings. Scores are not made public. (Where is WikiLeaks when you need it?)

Many players, including some who did not advance, worked wonders in the earlier rounds. Alexey Sychev, 28, of Russia surely delighted many in the semifinals with his fun-loving treatment of Ravel's La Valse. Alas, certain subpar interludes in his Liszt Sonata in B Minor put him out of the running.

Noh's interpretation of Stravinsky's Three Movements from Petrushka was dazzling, and both Cano Smit and Fejérvári did well by playing Schumann's unjustly neglected Humoreske. Fejérvári might have earned extra brownie points for programming unconventional solo works by Bartók and Janáček.

Fejérvári, Guarrera and Andreatta may not be the only prizewinners. Special awards, including honours for the best semifinal recital and the best performance of the compulsory Canadian work, are scheduled to be conferred Friday evening during the CMIM's gala concert.

This program with Flor and the OSM in the Maison symphonique involves past CMIM winners — soprano Measha Brueggergosman (2002), pianist Serhiy Salov (2004) and violinist Benjamin Beilman (2010) — as well as an encore performance of the Bartók with Fejérvári.

Teo Gheorghiu, the lone Canadian semifinalist, is the inevitable winner of the award for best Canadian, offered by the Bourbeau Foundation. Former Quebec finance minister André Bourbeau is the non-voting chairman of the CMIM jury.

CMIM artistic and general director Christiane LeBlanc probably spoke for many impressed onlookers (online as well as in person) in praising the calibre of this year's scrimmage.

"Clearly the highest level of playing we have had in CMIM piano editions," she said Thursday morning. "We heard some very rich musical personalities and true artists, which the jury detected and honoured."

ZOLTÁN FEJÉRVÁRI
PIANIST

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May 2015

Mozart: Violin Sonatas: in E minor K304; in A major K305; in B flat major K454; in A major K526

By David Denton



Though the booklet makes no reference to the use of period instruments, the tonal quality and style of performance would place this disc within that category. The joyful approach to K305 finds Zoltán Fejérvári's staccato keyboard ideally complementing the sparing use of vibrato by the young Hungarian-born violinist Ernő Kállai. It is, together with K304, one of Mozart's early two-movement sonatas, the duo adhering to the composer's description as 'sonatas for keyboard with violin accompaniment', and Fejérvári's tight trills coming close to the sound of a harpsichord.

The remainder of the disc is given to the extended sonatas from Mozart's later life, the instruments now sharing centre stage. Tempos in outer movements are brisk without being rushed, the central andantes flow with eloquent lyricism, and I particularly enjoy the mischievous approach to the opening movement of K454, a mood that carries over into the account of K526. Here we find the many scale passages, which can sound unduly hurried on so many discs, perfectly articulated.

The engineers provide an admirable balance between instruments and, though the violin part presents few challenges in these four works, Kállai's refined and elegant playing makes for a much recommended release.

ZOLTÁN FEJÉRVÁRI
PIANIST

THE HINDU

September 22, 2017

A class apart: in conversation with pianist Zoltán Fejérvári

By Keith A. Gomes



What does it really take of one to choose the classical music over the contemporary as a preference? Is it the same as saying, “I’d prefer a finely aged vintage port over a freshly brewed craft beer?” The Imperial Hotel organised a recital by Zoltán Fejérvári, a highly regarded pianist from Hungary. Having played solo recitals in various parts of Europe and the United States, and performed with the Budapest Festival Orchestra, the Hungarian National Orchestra, he brought to Nostalgia, the European restaurant at the hotel, Beethoven’s *Sonata in C*

Major and Kodály: Dances from Marosszék for Chamber Music enthusiasts living in the Capital.

“I was always surrounded by instruments since I belonged to a family of musicians — they were a part of the normalcy of life at home,” began Zoltán. But, out of all the instruments, why the piano? “It was always there, I didn’t have to tune it or anything. It just invited me to play,” he answered humbly. At the age of eight Zoltán had been enrolled into music school, where he ascertained that reading music came naturally to him; but, it was at the age of



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fifteen — the age when Hungarian musicians must attend Conservatory (music school for the pursuers) — that he began to practice rigorously. “And, by the time I was 18,” Zoltán added, “I was in Budapest, at the Listz Academy of Music, and I was attending concerts.”

Zoltán is among the proud pianists that have performed at prestigious venues such as Carnegie’s Weill Hall in New York, the Paul de Música in Valencia and Gasteig in Munich. And he’s worked with musicians such as Gary Hoffman and Josheph Lin, to name a few. Post all this experience of varying kinds, he’s learnt some philosophies which guide his performance on stage, out of which he shared a simple yet beautiful one, “It is only possible if you have faith, unlike the religious kind, it’s a strong belief in what you do, in the music you play,” and paradoxically he used the Bible for elucidation, “It’s like how Jesus walked on water, if you believe then you walk on that water, and if you don’t, you sink.” He laughed at that closing word, and substantiated the air of comfort about him.

“What music do I listen to? Let me think about that...” he wondered, making it rather strange since one would assume that he’d instantly blurt out a long list of names, “I like Jazz, specifically from the 20th century, but that’s strictly for when I’m alone. I listen to classical Viennese pieces, pieces from different periods like Renaissance, Romantic and also those of the Baroque style.” And to complete surprise he added, “I like some others like the Beatles and Queen, other than Beethoven, Schubert and Béla Batók. The rest escape my mind right now,” he laughed again as he added that final remark.

Zoltán won the 2017 Concours Musical International de Montréal for piano as well as was the recipient of the honoured

Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship. And, among the things he enjoys most, besides the piano, he enlisted: “I still enjoy watching DVDs or even old tapes on my VCR. And, I love playing Lego with my two sons. I used to love Lego as a kid, it’s lovely to return to them after so long. I even love my cat and my dog, their company is always a cheerful pleasure.” He also went on to tell about how he always makes it a point to catch up on reading, and among his favourites are Fyodor Dostoevsky, Milan Kundera, Herman Hesse and Thomas Mann. Zoltán likes the silence that is offered by villages until they become too oppressive, which is why he’s settled within an hour’s distance from the city.

The concert with Zoltán was a completion of the whole idea behind the restaurant, with its Steinway grand piano, of a journey into a classical space; it is an effort to create something that a selective few truly crave for in Delhi. And this brought about the question of numbers, where in the world did Zoltán come across the largest reception for Chamber Music? To which Zoltán answered without a second thought, “Germany, its rather heart warming to see how a majority of their towns have a Chamber Music series, thus there is some Chamber Music here or there in Germany all year round.”

“Music for me is the classical, it is the language I understand.” Said Zoltán as he continued with the conversation, and then went on to close with a thought that has stayed on with him since his academy days at Listz, where today he teaches Chamber Music, “My teacher, Andras Kemenes, I liked him, there was just this way about him and this one particular thing he’d teach everyone: you can’t lie on stage, never. It is on the stage that the musician must be the most honest of all.”