

*Samuel Rössler*

CONCERT PIANIST



PRESS KIT

# *Sandro Russo*

*Concert Pianist*

## **In the words of other musicians...**

“Sandro Russo is a musician’s musician, and a pianist’s pianist. There is no technical challenge too great for him, but it is his musicianship that ultimately makes the greatest impression. His interpretations reveal a unique and profound artist at work.” – **Lowell Liebermann**

“Sandro Russo is without question one of the most brilliant pianists of his generation. Apart from his dazzling technique, he performs with a profound sense of poetry and a distinctive style.” – **Seymour Bernstein**

“Sandro Russo is an artist to his finger tips. Musical, intuitive, and a master of the instrument.” – **Abbey Simon**

“I have enjoyed his artistry, his dedication to high standards, commitment to style and how to produce sound and communicate the music beyond the stage. He has a striking presence and is a throwback to the grand tradition of elegant pianism and beautiful sound.” – **Jeffrey Biegel**

“I have been very grateful for Sandro Russo’s interest in performing my piano music; his performances have shown great commitment, excellent attention to detail and a keen awareness of the interpretive needs of these various pieces. I hope his enjoyment of my music never ceases!” – **Marc-André Hamelin**

“Sandro played Liszt’s Concerto in A major brilliantly, with masterful technique and in the grand manner. He makes the piano sing and never forces the sound, even in forte. He was full up to the virtuosity of the piece and displayed a fine sense of poetry in the more lyric episodes.” – **David Gilbert**

# *Sandro Russo*

## *Concert Pianist*

Acclaimed for his profound sense of poetry and distinctive style, Sandro Russo has been in demand as a soloist in many venues around the world. He unanimously receives accolades for his sparkling virtuosity and his playing has often been referred to as a throwback to the grand tradition of elegant pianism and beautiful sound. Abbey Simon has praised him as “an artist to his fingertips...musical, intuitive, and a master of the instrument.” Lowell Liebermann has called him “a musician’s musician, and a pianist’s pianist. There is no technical challenge too great for him, but it is his musicianship that ultimately makes the greatest impression. His interpretations reveal a unique and profound artist at work.”

Born in San Giovanni Gemini, Italy, Mr. Russo displayed exceptional musical talent from an early age. After entering the V. Bellini Conservatory, from where he graduated *summa cum laude*, he went on to earn the Pianoforte Performing Diploma from the Royal College of Music in London, with honors. While still a student, he won top prize awards in numerous national and international competitions, including Senigallia and the Ibla Grand Prize. During that time, he performed in some of the country’s most reputable concert halls.

Soon after Mr. Russo moved to the United States in 2000, he won the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra Concerto Competition, which led to a performance of the Liszt A major Concerto at the Bergen Performing Arts Center in Englewood, NJ. Shortly thereafter, he gave an acclaimed Chopin recital at the prestigious Politeama Theatre in Palermo, Italy, and later appeared at the Nuove Carriere Music Festival, an international showcase for the world’s most promising young musicians.

Mr. Russo has also gained attention for an extensive repertoire that is comprised not only of well-known masterpieces from all periods but also of rarities of the piano literature. His virtuoso performances of works by Cziffra, Sorabji, Marc-André Hamelin and other composer-pianists have enthralled music lovers from around the world. He has also premiered compositions by Lowell Liebermann, Paul Moravec and Mr. Hamelin.

Mr. Russo has performed in such eminent concert halls as the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Konzerthaus Berlin, Salle Cortot in Paris, Teatro Politeama in Palermo, Weill and Zankel halls at Carnegie Hall and Nagasaki Brick Hall in Japan. His recitals include performances for The Rachmaninoff Society, the Dame Myra Hess series in Chicago, Concerts Grand in Santa Rosa (CA), the American Liszt Society, the Houston International Piano Festival, the Husum Festival of Piano Rarities in Germany and the Chetham’s International Piano Festival in Manchester (U.K.), among others. In November 2010 the Italian Academy Foundation presented Mr. Russo in a sold-out Chopin & Schumann anniversary concert at Carnegie Hall.

Mr. Russo has appeared as a soloist with the Slovak Philharmonic in Bratislava, The Jacksonville Symphony in Florida and The Brussels Chamber Orchestra in an opening gala of The Music Festival of the Hamptons. He also has toured with the Orchestra Sinfonica Siciliana for performances of the Rachmaninoff 3<sup>rd</sup> Piano Concerto and was the featured soloist with the New York Asian Symphony on tour in Japan.

In the summers of 2017 and 2018, Mr. Russo gave solo recitals in the recently opened Stoller Hall in Manchester, UK. He also performed in London (St. Mary's Perivale and Steinway Hall) and Vienna (Gegenklang), and in September 2017, he had the honor of performing with the world-renowned soprano, Sumi Jo, for the president of South Korea, to promote the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympics. In October 2018, he gave a highly praised performing in the Fernando Laires Series at the Eastman School of Music's Kilbourn Hall.

At the invitation of Bechstein-America, Mr. Russo had the privilege of recording a DVD on the historical 1862 Bechstein piano (#576), originally owned by Franz Liszt. Additionally, he had the opportunity to record a DVD on Horowitz's CD-75 Steinway piano; this represented the first recording made on this legendary instrument following Horowitz's death.

Mr. Russo's performances have aired on major radio stations in the US and abroad. His albums include, among others, *Scarlatti Recreated*, *Russian Gems: Piano Rarities* and *Rachmaninov – Solo Piano Works*. The latter was released to critical acclaim in March 2017 on the Steinway & Sons label and was chosen "Disc of the Month" by Italy's *The Classic Voice* magazine. Mr. Russo's latest album, *Images et Mirages: Hommage à Debussy*, was released on the Steinway & Sons label on October 19, 2018.

Sandro Russo is a [Steinway Artist](#).

[www.sandrorussopianist.com](http://www.sandrorussopianist.com)

# STEPHEN HOUGH

820 WEST END AVENUE

APT. 6E

NEW YORK

NY 10025

212 866 4686

To whom it may concern:

It gives me great pleasure to write this letter of recommendation for Sandro Russo.

In my opinion he is one of the most talented of the young pianists I have heard. He has a sparkling virtuoso technique, a warm and intelligent approach to whatever he plays, and an individual voice which sets him apart from so many of his contemporaries. He has a wide interest in repertoire of all kinds, not just the stock pieces heard in the hallways of every conservatory; and he also has a rare awareness of pianistic styles of the past and their relevance to interpretation of the present.

He deserves to have a lasting and successful professional career.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stanley H. Hough". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

## Seymour Bernstein

10 West 76th Street (Apt. 1A)

New York, NY 10023-1528

Tel. and Fax: (212) 874-4914

E-mail: seeless@msn.com

Monday, January 23, 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

Sandro Russo is without question one of the most brilliant pianists of this generation. I coached him for several years and heard him play and perform a vast and varied repertoire. No sooner does he begin a performance when audience members know that they will be treated to profound and poetic interpretations infused with an effortless and dazzling technique.

Last month I heard him in a recital for the *Leschetizky Society* in NYC, a performance which included the four Ballades of Chopin and the rarely performed Rachmaninoff 1<sup>st</sup> Sonata. To be succinct about it, I and the entire audience were mesmerized by his conception and the transcendental delivery of each and every phrase.

I believe Sandro Russo's artistry warrants a manager who will build for him the major career he deserves. It is a privilege to write this recommendation for such an outstanding artist.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Seymour Bernstein". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Adjunct Associate Professor of Music and Music Education, New York University.

Tuesday, October 10, 2006 11:19 PM

**Re: letter for Sandro**

**From:**

"Hammahklavier@aol.com" <Hammahklavier@aol.com>

**To:**

sanrus\_76@yahoo.com

I have been very grateful for Sandro Russo's interest in performing my piano music; his performances have shown great commitment, excellent attention to detail and a keen awareness of the interpretive needs of these various pieces. I hope his enjoyment of my music never ceases!

(Letter from Marc-André Hamelin)

**VLADIMIR FELTSMAN**  
**18 Hawk Hill Road**  
**New Paltz, NY 12561**

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I recommend highly Sandro Russo for your concert series.

He is a gifted artist with a strong stage presence. I am sure that his performance will be a success.

Sincerely,

Vladimir Feltsman

October 2, 2011



**DR. VLADIMIR LEYETCHKISS**  
**PIANIST**  
**2119 HOWARD • EVANSTON, ILLINOIS 60202**  
**(847) 869-5930**

To Whom It May Concern:

October, 2008

Sandro Russo is a pianist with an uncommon poetical skill, matched with a peerless technical facility. He is able to draw the listener immediately to the emotional message the composer is trying to convey, as the mechanical challenges of playing the piano disappear under his hands. I was especially honored to hear his performance of my transcription of parts of the Rachmaninoff's *Second Suite* for two pianos. Those of us who write for the piano count ourselves very fortunate when someone of Mr. Russo's artistic sensitivity and effortless virtuosity brings our work to life.

Vladimir Leyetchkiss  
*Pianist, transcriber, teacher*



10  
12  
5

Vladimir  
Leyetchkiss

Jeffrey Biegel, B.M., M.M.  
PIANIST  
32 Brook Road  
Valley Stream, New York 11581  
Tel: (516) 791-9374 FAX: (718) 382-4677

March, 2001

To Whom It May Concern:

I have known Sandro Russo for a short period but have enjoyed his artistry, his dedication to high standards, commitment to style and how to produce sound and communicate the music beyond the stage. He has a striking presence and is, in some ways, a throwback to the grand tradition of elegant pianism and beautiful sound. Whether it be for concert promotion, competition acceptance or teacher interviews, I strongly recommend Mr. Russo in any capacity his music making shall take him.

With every good wish,

Jeffrey Biegel



**MANHATTAN**  
**SCHOOL OF MUSIC**

April 2, 2001

To Whom It May Concern:

I wish to recommend the young pianist, Sandro Russo. I recently conducted a performance, with my Bergen Philharmonic, of the *Piano Concerto No. 2*, by Liszt, with Mr. Russo as soloist. He was the winner of our annual Bergen Philharmonic Competition.

Mr. Russo played brilliantly, with masterful technique and in the grand manner. He makes the piano sing and never forces the sound, even in forte. He was fully up to the virtuosity of the piece and displayed a fine sense of poetry in the more lyric episodes.

I recommend him highly. He deserves strong consideration.

Most sincerely yours,

*David Gilbert*

David Gilbert  
Resident Conductor, Manhattan School of Music  
Music Director, Greenwich Symphony Orchestra and Bergen Philharmonic

From: "Teatro Ghione" <teatroghione@tin.it>  
To: "SANDRO RUSSO" <sanrus\_76@yahoo.com>  
Subject: 📧 Sandro Russo Letter of Praise  
Date: Fri, 14 Jul 2006 15:38:12 +0200

**TEATRO GHIONE**  
**Via delle Fornaci, 37**  
**Rome – Italy**  
**Tel. 06/6372294**

To whom it may concern:

SANDRO RUSSO performed in our Master Series in Rome at the Ghione Theatre last February.

A quite unusually interesting programme, to say the least, and played with quite remarkable artistry.

An extraordinary sense of colour combined with a real technique, in the sense that he could transmit the most varied sounds as his great sense of intelligent musicality demanded.

I am sure this is just the start of a long and very interesting career and we look forward to hearing more from this very out of the ordinary artist.

Christopher Axworthy ARAM

Artistic Director of the Ghione Theatre in Rome  
[www.ghione.it](http://www.ghione.it)

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August 6, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

RE: Sandro Russo

I write to inform you that we have had the privilege of presenting Sandro Russo at our celebrated Moiseiwitsch Piano Recital Series. This past season he was received with a standing ovation.

Additionally, at our Opening Gala our Artistic Director Michael Guttman chose Sandro Russo as the Soloist in the Hayden Piano Concerto.

His performance was illuminating and truly memorable. The level of artistry that Mr. Russo offers is rare indeed.

We know your audience will be equally enthralled. Wishing you much success.

Most Sincerely,



Eleanor Sage Leonard  
President/Founder

August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008

To Whom it May Concern,

It was a wonderful experience working with Louho Russo, this past summer at the Music Festival of the Hamptons.

In the Haydn Concerto in D, Louho showed impeccable technique, great musicianship and a wonderful contact with the audience. Also in rehearsal and concert he always showed to be 100% reliable and solid throughout.

I would love to work with him again in a minute!

I wish him all the best in his future plans

Neil 

Michael GUTMAN

Music Director - Music Festival of the Hamptons  
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founded 1942

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Genia Robiner (1970-91)

Arminda Canteros (1991-94)

October 12, 2004

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Sandro Russo

This letter is to recommend SANDRO RUSSO to your competition. He is a student of Seymour Bernstein, a long-standing member of the Leschetizky Association, and had played on our Artist Student Recital in January of 2004. As president of the Leschetizky Association I was so impressed with his playing that I invited Mr. Russo to perform a solo recital on the Leschetizky Association concert artist series at the Tenri Cultural Institute, on February 15, 2004

Mr. Russo performed a virtuosic recital including Chopin's Twelve Etudes Op. 10, and a selection of works written by composer-pianists including Brahms-Busoni's Chorale Prelude "A Rose Breaks into Blooms", Stephen Hough's Etude de Concert "La Russe", Schubert-Rachmaninoff's "Wohin", Sorabji's Pastiche on the Habanera from Bizet's Carmen, Earl Wild's Jarabe Tapatio "The Mexican Hat Dance", and Strauss-Godowsky's Symphonic Metamorphosis of Themes from Die Fledermaus.

His recital displayed a most interesting selection of pieces that showed off his splendid technique and innate musicality. His command of the piano is on a par with any world-class artist and he informs his playing with a love of music and the piano that is at once engaging and inspiring. He represents the highest standard of piano playing and the standard of the Leschetizky Association at its best.

I give him my highest recommendation and can assure that you will enjoy his playing, and perhaps even be amazed!

Yours truly,

Mara Waldman  
President, The Leschetizky Association



## *House Concerts*

*Elizabeth Lauer,  
Coordinator*

October 10, 2004

### SANDRO RUSSO

This letter comes from the Coordinator for the House Concert Series of Connecticut Alliance for Music, whose job is to schedule four performances each season; one of these is usually a solo piano recital. It was the easiest choice in the world to engage Sandro Russo for the current season: he is always a great favorite with audiences; he chooses programs that are musically on-target, from both known and unfamiliar repertoire; he presents exciting and thoughtful interpretations of these selections; and he is prepared so thoroughly that listeners need only sit back and listen, secure in the knowledge that here is a musician of solid proportions.

Sandro gives each composer his/her due, with a spot-on sense of idiom: Haydn's works are played with fluency, clarity, proportion, and humor; those of Liszt emerge with all colors (and notes) intact, hair-raisingly accurate, but never "note-y"; compositions of our time are given the full range of this marvelous pianist's fine mind and powers of imagination and keyboard technique. (The last-named attribute is very close to my heart, since I am a composer.) And speaking of technique: his is stunning, but it is only after one has heard a finger-and-endurance buster that the realization of his exceptional prowess comes to mind.

The solo programs which Sandro Russo puts together (this includes his two excellent solo CDs) attest to his overarching musicianship: he never throws together a bunch of pieces (as refrigerator soup), each from a different period of musical history. Instead, there is always a musical (dare one say, even pedagogical?) thread that runs through his choices, that leads the listener along a path that is well thought out, well heard, by the pianist - a banquet of similarities, juxtapositions, pairings, and the like. It is clear that in Sandro's programming, nothing taken for granted, nothing is pro forma. His arrangement is repertoire is always fascinating.

Sandro Russo has my highest recommendation. He is clearly prepared to assume the responsibilities, the rigors, the demands of a career as a professional pianist.





# OF *Note...*

FALL 2004

**Concert Review: *Sandro Russo, Pianist***  
*October 3, 2004*  
*Greenwich, CT*

Last Sunday, the Italian pianist Sandro Russo played an extraordinary and varied recital presented by Connecticut Alliance for Music in Greenwich, Connecticut. Even in today's world where audiences are not surprised by virtuosic feats, Russo's ability to unravel the thorniest passages with the utmost ease and clarity is astonishing. But what truly sets him apart is his ability to find the poetry within everything he plays.

From the first elegantly turned phrase of the Haydn Sonata in Ab Major, Hob. XVI:46, to the insistent and wildly difficult octave patterns of the Alkan Symphony Opus 39, Russo showed himself to be in total command as a pianist, a musician and a poet. His sound is never harsh; his love of counterpoint is evident. His performance of the Liszt Etude "Feux Follets," infamous for its hair-raising difficulty, was a study of breathtaking lightness and fancy. He went straight to the heart of the Nocturne No. 5, Opus 55 (1996) by Lowell Liebermann and communicated it with great and persuasive sensitivity. And I cannot imagine that I will ever hear the concert paraphrase of "The Marines' Hymn" by Offenbach-Gimpel played with such a rollicking ease and grace, exactly capturing the pride and spirit of the song of the soldiers.

*Gayle Martin Henry*  
*President*  
*Connecticut Alliance for Music*

The Union Church of Bay Ridge  
8101 Ridge Boulevard  
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11209  
Tel. 718-745-0438  
Fax 718-745-0439  
E-mail: [brucem@brooklyn.cuny.edu](mailto:brucem@brooklyn.cuny.edu)

October 10, 2004

TO: WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

FROM: Bruce MacIntyre, Coordinator  
Union Church Concert Series



RE: **Sandro Russo's Recital on September 26, 2004**

.....  
On Sunday afternoon, September 26, The Union Church Concert series resumed with a spectacular piano recital by **Sandro Russo**. For over ninety minutes Mr. Russo held nearly one hundred listeners in rapt attention as he presented a varied and challenging program of works by composers from the eighteenth to twenty-first centuries.

The concert opened with a charming early Haydn sonata in A flat major (Hob. XVI: 46). The *cantilene* and thin textures of its endearing slow movement were played with great care and control by Mr. Russo, and the final *presto* sparkled in typical Haydnesque fashion.

Next, Mr. Russo succeeded in plumbing and realizing the various moods and compositional depths of Rachmaninoff's "Variations on a Theme of Corelli." He made the many introspective moments in this extended work sound fresh and spontaneous, as though they were being composed right then and there, the way the composer-pianist himself used to do. The piano's percussive nature was occasionally too apparent in some of the *fortissimo* variations, yet this was artistically balanced by the "whispering" dynamics in other variations.

The lively Finale from the Symphony in Alkan's twelve etudes in minor keys, op. 39, provided a brilliant, indeed "symphonic," conclusion to the program's first half.

The second half consisted of six selections, starting with a gripping rendition of Scriabin's rarely done Fantaisie, op. 28. Then Mr. Russo's impressive ability as a "tone- and mood-painter" with the pianoforte came to the fore in Liszt's "Feux-foilets" (Transcendental Etude no. 5) as well as "El Puerto" and Triana" from Albeniz's *Iberia*. The various hues in these works dazzled the ears.

Next we heard a pair of nocturnes from 1921 and 1996. First was the gorgeous, seldom performed Nocturne in B minor (op. 119, no. 13) by Fauré, whose lyrical, heart-rending melodies were played with just the right *legato*. Second, in Lowell Liebermann's Nocturne no. 5, op. 55, Russo showed his mastery of its many contrasting, intimate moods -- often with a full range of dynamic shadings, including a ravishingly controlled *pianississimo*.

Mr. Russo's easy yet thrilling virtuosity -- with its nimble finger dexterity and enormous, controlled dynamic range -- came to the fore in several of the selections, particularly the Rachmaninoff, Scriabin, Liszt, and Liebermann. And the attentive Union Church audience leaped to its feet with calls of "*bravissimo*" after Russo's closing rendition of the dashing Offenbach-Gimpel paraphrase on "The Marines' Hymn," with its many quick changes of register and ear-tickling *glissandi*. By then no one in attendance had any doubts that Russo is indeed a sensitive pianist of the first rank.

cc: Editor, *The Kings-Courier*, Brooklyn, N.Y.

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**FRI | OCT 19 | 7:30 PM**

**Sandro Russo**

*"An excellent pianist with a good sound, technique, and range of styles." – Garrick Ohlsson*

Accustomed to his profound sense of poetry and distinctive style, Sandro Russo has been in demand as a soloist in many venues around the world. He unanimously receives accolades for his sparkling virtuosity, and his playing has often been referred to as a throwback to the grand tradition of elegant pianism and beautiful sound.

**THU | FEB 21 | 7:30 PM**

**Lilya Zilberstein**

*"Lilya is a flawless pianist with a completely natural way of playing, simply world class!" – Martha Argerich*

Since winning First Prize in the 1997 Busoni International Piano Competition, Lilya Zilberstein has established herself as one of the finest pianists in the world. She has recorded with the Berlin Philharmonic and appears regularly with the finest international orchestras. An intimate and sought-after collaborator, Ms. Zilberstein has been performing with Martha Argerich for many years.

**FRI | JAN 18 | 7:30 PM**

**Seong-Jin Cho**

*"Cho paints with transparency and exuberance... his playing is riveting as ever." – The Guardian*

The young South Korean pianist's mature musicianship and refined artistry secured him First Prize at the 10th Chopin International Piano Competition in 2015. Since then he has won a significant international following, underlined by the pop-chart-topping status of his Deutsche Grammophon debut album, invitations to appear at the world's foremost concert halls, and a succession of superlative reviews.

**FRI | MAR 1 | 7:30 PM**

**Beatrice Rana**

*"Beatrice possesses an old soul that belies her twenty years, and more than a touch of genius" – Gramophone*

A highly anticipated return to Eastman, Gramophone's 2017 "Young Artist of the Year" Beatrice Rana is making waves on the international classical music scene, arousing admiration and interest from conductors, critics, and audiences around the world.

Beatrice Rana's appearance is made possible in part by the Eastman Endowment.

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## CLASSICAL CD REVIEWS



# RACHMANINOV: Piano Sonata No. 1 in d minor; 3 Etudes-Tableaux; 4 Songs; Variations on a Theme of Corelli – Sandro Russo, p. – Steinway & Sons

by [Audiophile Audition](#) / April 11, 2017 / [Classical CD Reviews](#)

Sandro Russo pays homage to the continuity of style and mood in early and late works of Sergei Rachmaninov.

RACHMANINOV: Solo Piano Works = Piano Sonata No. 1 in d minor, Op. 28; 3 Etudes-Tableaux; 4 Songs (arr. E. Wild); Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op. 42 – Sandro Russo, piano – Steinway & Sons 30077, 78:04 (3/17/17) [Distr. by Naxos] \*\*\*\*:



A graduate of the Vincenzo Bellini Conservatory and the Royal College of Music in London, pianist Sandro Russo means “to showcase the multiple facets of [Rachmaninov’s] artistic language.” Russo (rec. 13 & 20 June 2016) addresses the imposing Piano Sonata No. 1 (1908), a piece inspired by both the Faust legend and the Liszt Faust Symphony, with its musical portraits of Faust, Gretchen, and Mephistopheles. In fact, the sketches for the d minor Sonata suggest Rachmaninov’s symphonic ambitions, though he would discard any program from the piece, as such. In three large, intricate movements, the sonata resonates with the ubiquitous Dies Irae of the Requiem Mass, especially given Rachmaninov’s gothic sensibility and his admiration of the Liszt Totentanz. Rachmaninov presented the draft of the work to colleague Konstantin Igumnov, who premiered the work.



Russo attacks the first movement Allegro moderato with pungent fervor, its Russian bells ringing and its folk idiom in lyrical bel canto. Russo builds an impressive, mounting arch that ripples with scales and huge block chords and repeated notes. The percussive aspects of the score may become too intrusive for some tastes. The element of longing detectable in this music might be attributed to Rachmaninov’s fascination with Byron’s Manfred, his having set the Tchaikovsky symphony for two pianos. The Lento casts a romantic glow rife with Schumann conceits, particularly the Romance in

F-sharp Major, Op. 28, No. 2. The watery, singing line in broken figures might echo Scriabin and Rachmaninov's own c minor Concerto.

The Allegro molto contains galloping figures that resonate with militant hauteur and a strong sense of the opening movement of the Chopin Second Sonata. This movement ends with a kind of epilogue, at first meditative in glossy arpeggios, reminiscent of Schumann's *Fantasia*, Op. 17. Then, Rachmaninov's thick stretti and polyphony take over, invoking those Russian bells in tandem with Beethoven's "fate" motive. The character of the music – rather emotionally wrought – helps explain why this work has not yet held thrall over audiences, but Russo's conviction of its merits – along with performances by the likes of Alexis Weissenberg – may overcome the collective coolness towards its power.

Russo's set of three *Etudes-Tableaux*: in c minor, Op. 33, No. 3; in e-flat minor, Op. 33, No. 6; and in e-flat minor, Op. 39, No. 5 fill out his vision of the composer's lachrymose sensibility that still embraces a tender poetry. "Six feet of gloom" had been Stravinsky's assessment of the tall and lean Rachmaninov. Much pedal assists Russo's enunciation of the Rachmaninov ethos, which occasionally resonates with an organ sonority that rivals Busoni's notion of Bach. The Op. 33, No. 6 echoes aspects of Medtner, as a kind of fairy-tale etude-scherzo. The Op. 39, No. 5 projects that colossal (percussive) majesty we hear also in the b minor Prelude, with clear homage to Chopin.

Russo chooses four of American virtuoso Earl Wild's transcriptions of Rachmaninov songs: "Dreams," Op. 38, No. 5; "Floods of Spring," Op. 14, No. 11; "The Little Island," Op. 14, No. 2; and "Where Beauty Dwells," Op. 21, No. 7. These pieces exploit the piano's delicacy as much as the etudes serve its percussion. Plastic and lyrical, these renditions solidify Russo's own capacity to capture intimate, salon sentiments without affectation. The Op. 14, No. 11 owes a debt to Turgenev in its emotional urgency. The suavely gorgeous keyboard sound comes to us courtesy of Engineer Ryan Streber. "The Little Island" links Rachmaninov with Debussy and Liszt (his *Un sospiro*), perhaps by way of Mendelssohn. More passionate arpeggios grace "Where Beauty Dwells," whose roulades and flourishes obviously charm Russo as much as we.

Russo selects Rachmaninov's only published piano solo work outside of Russia (1931) for his finale: Rachmaninov wrote the *Variations on a Theme of Corelli* in 1931 while he vacationed in Switzerland. The theme of the work, though attributed to Corelli, belongs in fact to *La Folia*, whose origins, at least in printed music, go back to at least the mid-17th century and some fifty years, and essentially presents a chord progression in d minor with a few passing bars in the relative major. Rachmaninov likely admired it as part of his knowledge of Franz Liszt's *Rhapsodie Espagnole*. Typical of Rachmaninov's late style – of the Fourth Piano Concerto – the setting of the theme, terse and laconic, casts a neo-Classic hue on the proceedings.

The twenty variations that follow resemble a full-scale sonata. The first thirteen encapsulate what might be considered a sonata's first movement, embracing a variety of moods. An ornamental and cadenza-like "Interlude," loosely based on the theme, then follows before proceeding to the next variations. Shifting to the key of D-flat Major, the following two variations together form a sort of central slow movement and present *La Folia* in sweetly lyrical tones. Finally, the remaining five variations form the work's finale, returning abruptly to the tonic key and building the theme through increasingly energetic treatments. With an air of solemnity and mystery the work fades from the fortissimo of the final variation to close softly in the key of d minor. Besides having mastered the sheer digital obstacles Rachmaninov created as a salute to his own, enormous hands, Russo maintains a flexible, fluent line that carries us dramatically even through the poised silences, quite a feat of intelligent virtuosity!

—Gary Lemco

CLASSIC VOICE

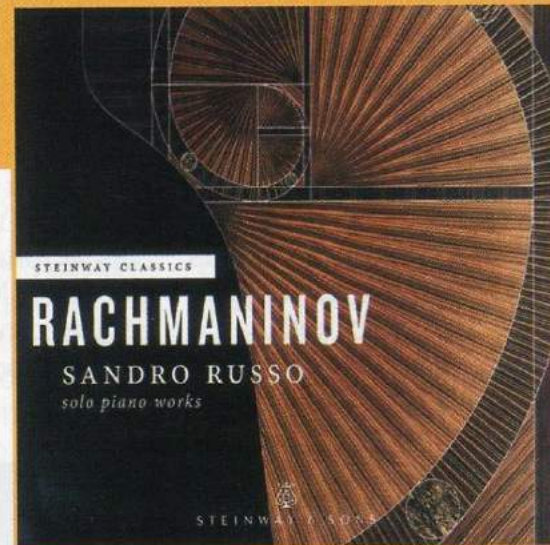
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“RUSSO DIMOSTRA QUI DI ESSERE IN POSSESSO DI UN DOMINIO DEL MEZZO OGGI CONCESSO A POCHI ESECUTORI”

La prima Sonata di Rachmaninov, un tempo praticamente sconosciuta al disco e all'esecuzione in pubblico, è stata poi riportata alla luce da numerosi pianisti di valore, da Ciccolini (che aprì probabilmente la strada alla riscoperta nel lontano 1958) ad Askhenazy, Weissenberg e la Biret (in disco) ai più giovani Mustonen, Berezovsky, Trifonov, Lugansky, Romanowsky, non a caso quasi tutti interpreti di matrice russo-slava. Nella sua breve nota di copertina Russo ricorda il programma faustiano alla base della Sonata e le radici del *Dies Irae*, spesso citate da Rachmaninov in numerose sue composizioni. Come ricordavamo in un passato numero di "Classic Voice", il programma - analogo a quello che caratterizza la Sonata di Liszt - era citato anche dall'autore in una lettera a Morozov e ripreso in una memoria del primo interprete del pezzo, Kostantin Igumnov.

La lettura della prima sonata da parte di Russo è di notevole valore, come si può notare immediatamente dalla so-

lennità dell'attacco e dal successivo passaggio virtuosistico che porta alla comparsa del tema cantabile. Tutto è improntato a sottolineare giustamente la drammaticità dell'impianto con notevoli approfondimenti che possono nascere solamente da una conoscenza profonda dello stile dell'autore e la Sonata è portata al suo compimento con un crescendo irresistibile di emozioni e di alto pianismo. L'impostazione virtuosistica unita alle caratteristiche di proprietà stilistica sono però bene evidenti anche nel resto del programma di questo prezioso disco che comprende le Variazioni su un tema di Corelli, una scelta di *Etudes-Tableaux* e tre Melodie trascritte da quel mago della tastiera che era Earl Wild. In quest'ultimo caso non è per nulla facile riproporre sulla tastiera il fascino di una scrittura che amplifica - sempre nel rispetto più assoluto dello stile - il già complesso linguaggio dell'autore. Ma Russo dimostra qui di essere in possesso di un dominio del mezzo oggi concesso a pochi



esecutori. Di pari livello è l'esecuzione delle Variazioni op. 42, ultimo grande lavoro di Rachmaninov, dove la concorrenza discografica e concertistica si fa davvero proibitiva.

LUCA CHERICI

**RACHMANINOV**  
SONATA N. 1 OP. 28  
VARIAZIONI SUL TEMA DI CORELLI  
OP. 42  
ETUDES-TABLEAUX  
PIANOFORTE Sandro Russo  
CD Steinway & Sons 30077  
PREZZO d. d.  
★★★★★

Translation of original review by Luca Chierici in *Classic Voice*, Italy, May 18, 2017

<http://www.classicvoice.com/rivista/recensioni-cd/rachmaninov-sonata-n-1-op-28-variazioni-sul-tema-di-corelli-op-42-etudes-tableaux/#.WR5nE6W6GHM.facebook>

**“RUSSO SHOWS HERE THAT HE POSSESSES AN INSTRUMENTAL  
COMMAND GRANTED TO FEW PERFORMERS”**

The first Rachmaninoff Sonata, once practically unknown to disc and live performances, was then brought back to light by several valuable pianists, from Ciccolini (who probably opened the path to its rediscovery as far back as 1958) to Askhenazy, Weissenberg and Biret (in recording), to the younger Mustonen, Berezovsky, Trifonov, Lugansky, Romanowsky, not by chance almost all interpreters of Russian-Slavic matrix. In his brief program notes Russo reminds us of the Faustian program at the base of the sonata and the *Dies Irae* roots, often cited by Rachmaninoff in his numerous compositions. As we remembered in a past issue of "Classic Voice," the program – analogous to the one that characterizes the Liszt Sonata – was also cited by the composer in a letter to Morozov, as well as in a recollection by Kostantin Igumnov, the first interpreter of the work."

Russo's account of the first sonata is of noteworthy value, as immediately noticed from the solemnity of the attack and the subsequent virtuoso passage that leads to the appearance of the *cantabile* theme. Everything is shaped to properly emphasize the drama of the plot with considerable insights that can only be born out of a profound knowledge of the composer's style. Thus, the Sonata is brought to its completion with an irresistible crescendo of emotions and high-level pianism. The virtuoso approach combined with stylistic attributes are also well evident in the rest of the program of this precious album that includes the Variations on a theme of Corelli, a selection of Etudes-tableaux and three songs transcribed by that keyboard wizard Earl Wild. In the latter case, it is by no means easy to reproduce on the keyboard the fascination of a composition that amplifies – always within an absolute respect of style – the already complex composer's language. But Russo shows here that he possesses an instrumental command granted to few performers. Of equal level is the rendition of the Variations Op. 42, Rachmaninoff's last great work that already has seen the highest levels of recording and performance by the competition.

Translation of Luca Chierici's original review in *Classic Voice*, Italy, May 18, 2017

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03/31/17

SANDRO RUSSO/Rachmaninov--Solo Piano Works: The kind of hard hitting, committed piano player that arts councils should have been created for, this classical piano man tackles the Rachmaninov canon and doesn't stop at just the warhorse repertoire. Finding music where other piano players didn't bother to look, this is a technician and tactician that stands and delivers rather than searches and destroys giving the listener more than what he thinks he came for. A dazzling work that does more for détente than anything political can.

30077

Volume 40/Number 150

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## **RACHMANINOFF:** *Early Piano Pieces*

Elisa Tomellini  
Piano Classics 123—78 minutes

As a lifetime Rachmaninoff aficionado, I really appreciate this record. Besides the first-rate performances, not many of the pieces here are heard or recorded very often. Everything was composed 1886-94 by a young composer just beginning to find his voice. Notably absent from this collection are the five pieces from Op.3, which includes the famous Prelude in C-sharp minor. That opus gets performed and recorded often. I have only come across the 'Humoresque' (heard here in its 1940 revised version) and the 'Barcarolle' from the *Morceau de Salon* apart from recordings of the complete opus (Horowitz on RCA). The four-movement Suite in D minor (1890-91) is a piano transcription of an early orchestral work. It was only discovered in 2002 in a collection of Siloti's papers. This 20-minute work is well worth getting to know and has been recorded a few times before, but not as convincingly as here. The *Nocturnes* (1887-88) have been recorded many times since their first US publication in the early 1970s, but have never entered the mainstream of piano repertoire. Tomellini's interpretation might help remedy that situation. The same holds true for the Four Pieces Rachmaninoff originally considered for his Opus 1.

This disc is also part of Piano Classics 111, Rachmaninoff's Complete Piano Music [6CD]. Either way, it sheds new light on the composer's early piano music. When taken in this context, the Op. 10 pieces assume a significance not generally associated with them, and I can't recall enjoying these pieces more.

HARRINGTON

## **RACHMANINOFF:** *Piano Sonata 1; Corelli Variations; 3 Etudes-Tableaux; 4 Song Transcriptions*

Sandro Russo  
Steinway 30077—78 minutes

Russo has come my way before with Russian repertoire (Musical Concepts 150, N/D 2014). He is an exciting, very talented pianist, born in Sicily but a resident of the US since 2000. Now the Steinway artist has his first disc on that top label. As expected, it is generously filled, with excellent piano sound and good program notes. I have discs with just the sonata and Corelli Variations, but here we get an additional seven pieces—25 minutes more music.

Sonata 1 is probably my favorite of Rachmaninoff's large piano compositions. It opened the composer's first solo piano recital at Carnegie Hall in 1909. Rarely heard 40 years ago, it is played and recorded much more often these days, but nowhere as often as Sonata 2. Without the benefit of a champion like Horowitz, and with a difficulty level comparable to Piano Concerto 3, this work requires a pianist with vast reserves of technique, power, and interpretive skill. Russo succeeds on all counts. He doesn't knock Ogdon (RCA) from my top spot, primarily because of the flow and drive, which can start and stop here but is relentless with Ogdon. Of course, the 1968 RCA piano sound can't compare with Steinway's 2017 sound, and Russo has many beautiful and important things to say about this work.

The Corelli Variations are just as well played and recorded, but I do object to the 18 minute work as only one track.

In between the two big works, we are treated to three nicely contrasting Etudes-Tableaux: Op.33:3 in C minor and 33:6 and 39:5 in E-flat minor. The inclusion of four of Earl Wild's brilliant song transcriptions makes this release even more irresistible. I have the greatest admiration for pianists who can play these murderously difficult arrangements. I know how hard the original accompaniments are; I have performed all four of the songs with a singer: 'Dreams,' 'Floods of Spring,' 'The Little Island' and 'Here It Is Beautiful.' Wild adds extra verses, harmonic modulations, and tons of notes to the original; but everything he does is fully in keeping with Rachmaninoff's style. I believe that the composer would have approved.

HARRINGTON

## **RACHMANINOFF:** *Symphony 1;*

**BALAKIREV:** *Tamara*  
London Symphony/ Valery Gergiev  
LSO 784 [SACD] 61 minutes

"You can't phone it in", goes the old saying. Well, Gergiev sort of does here. There's a certain soullessness to this performance that reminds me of the emptiness of the "Phone Dead" generation.

Gergiev doesn't turn in a bad performance of the symphony; it's just not entirely convincing or interesting. Of course, the work's premiere in St Petersburg in 1897 was one of the famous failures of musical history. The orchestra was under-rehearsed; the conductor, Alexander Glazounov, was unsympathetic to

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Rachmaninov: Solo Piano Works

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### AllMusic Review by James Manheim [-]

The fine Steinway & Sons label has attempted, in various ways, to re-create the pianistic world of a century ago, in which a recital of music by [Rachmaninov](#) would have been a common entry indeed. In his adopted United States, the recital might have been by the composer/pianist himself. Famous for his powerful hands, he is associated with sounds that could make the walls ring in a good-sized symphony hall, but the fact is that for an ordinary piano recital, which might often have taken place in a smaller space, more intimate approaches are reasonable. That's what you get in this enjoyable album by [Sandro Russo](#). Russo chooses works that generally respond well to his elegant, rather refined treatment, starting off with the comparatively rare Piano Sonata No. 1 in D minor, Op. 28, with its general inspiration by Goethe's Faust and its inward atmosphere. Russo goes on with works that connect with each other in more or less subtle ways that he explains a short booklet note. Some of them are arrangements by [Earl Wild](#) of non-piano works (sample one of these for the flavor of the whole), and these make a lovely interlude before the final flourish. In general, Russo seems more concerned with shades than with pianistic fireworks, and he's one of a group of young pianists who have been finding these in [Rachmaninov](#), and finding, in general, that he was more aware of Impressionist developments than he has been given credit for. You may wish for a bit more blood and thunder in the final Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op. 42, but here too Russo's approach is original. Steinway & Sons departs from its usual concert venues for a studio recording here, and the results are superb. A recommended new take on [Rachmaninov](#).

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AI Murs  
April 24, 2017



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[Gentle](#)  
[Melancholy](#)  
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## Piano Sonata No. 1 in D minor, Op. 28

	1	<b>I. Allegro moderato</b> Sergey Rachmaninov	Sandro Russo	12:06
	2	<b>II. Lento</b> Sergey Rachmaninov	Sandro Russo	8:27
	3	<b>III. Allegro molto</b> Sergey Rachmaninov	Sandro Russo	14:34

## Etudes - Tableaux, Op. 33

	4	<b>No. 3 in C minor</b> Sergey Rachmaninov	Sandro Russo	5:08
	5	<b>No. 6 in E Flat minor</b> Sergey Rachmaninov	Sandro Russo	1:43

## Etudes - Tableaux, Op. 39

	6	<b>No. 5 in E Flat minor</b> Sergey Rachmaninov	Sandro Russo	5:22
	7	<b>Dreams, Op. 38 No. 5 (Arr. Wild)</b> Sergey Rachmaninov	Sandro Russo	3:15
	8	<b>Floods of Spring, Op. 14 No. 11 (Arr. Wild)</b> Sergey Rachmaninov	Sandro Russo	3:52
	9	<b>The Little Island, Op. 14 No. 2 (Arr. Wild)</b> Sergey Rachmaninov	Sandro Russo	2:12
	10	<b>Where Beauty Dwells, Op. 21 No. 7 (Arr. Wild)</b> Sergey Rachmaninov	Sandro Russo	3:29
	11	<b>Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op. 42</b> Sergey Rachmaninov	Sandro Russo	17:51

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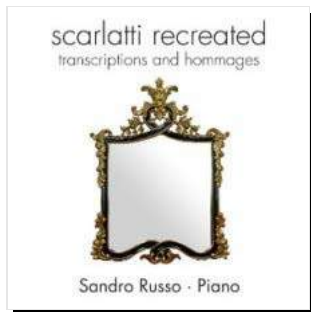
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## Delectable Scarlatti Recreations

Review by: Jed Distler



Artistic Quality: 10  
 Sound Quality: 10

What a wonderful idea: Here's a program that features transcriptions of Domenico Scarlatti's keyboard sonatas along with original works that use the sonatas as a jumping-off point. Many Classical- and Romantic-period composers and pianists felt the need to update Scarlatti's keyboard textures by filling in chords, adding double notes or octaves, or spicing up the harmonies. Politically incorrect by 21st-century standards, true, but "inauthenticity" can be fun, especially in the hands of a pianist like Sandro Russo.

He revels in Louis Brassin's unabashedly upholstered transformation of the K. 525 F major sonata and its humorously leaping embellishments, and conveys the full impact of Granados' subtle, full-bodied piano writing with little help from the sustain pedal. The multi-layered strands of Ignaz Friedman's busy rewrite of K. 523 suggests an overdubbed second piano, while Russo captures the impetuous quality of Marc-André Hamelin's bitonal Scarlatti-based etude with no less sparkle than in the composer's own performances. And although several pianists have taken up Raymond Lewenthal's nutty, harmonically pungent Scarlatti-like Toccata in recent years, Russo's crisp rhythms and slightly dry touch are just what the doctor ordered. Even after you've finished playing this disc, your ears will continue to smile.

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 Works by Tausig, Brassin, Granados, [Russo, Sandro](#) (piano)  
 Czerny, Friedman, Alkan, Hamelin, Françaix, [Musical Concepts](#) - 149  
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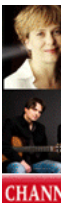
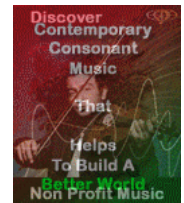
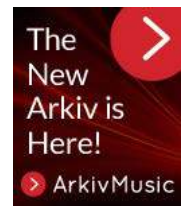
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# MY VOICE

## Scarlatti Recreated

scarlatti recreated  
transcriptions and hommages



Sandro Russo · Piano

Sandro Russo's *Scarlatti Recreated*, released Sep 24, 2013 on the Musical Concepts label, is an ambitious and fanciful undertaking in that the 'reinvented' repertoire is highly original. In fact, on the album there are four world-premiere recordings referring to the essential Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757). A contemporary of Händel, Scarlatti's baroque writing had been largely forgotten, gaining new popularity in the mid-twentieth century, as the liner notes of the recording suggest. In this recording, Russo deals with extraordinarily difficult material, solving their intricacies with his own, masterly understanding of the genre. He manages to adapt with a most elegant reverence to the different composers stylistic commentaries, without ever losing his own sensitive and personal touch.

Based in New York, Italian-born Sandro Russo has been lauded as an exceptionally poetic pianist with verve for the newfound joy of transcription. In 2005, he met Vladimir Leyetchkiss at the International Conference of the Rachmaninoff Society in London, whose transcription of Rachmaninov's waltz and romance from his 2<sup>nd</sup> suite for two pianos Op. 17 caught Russo's interest. Leyetchkiss approached Russo to play some of the movements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> suite transcription in recital. Leyetchkiss had originally intended this oeuvre for Cyprien Katsaris, who never ended up playing it; Russo

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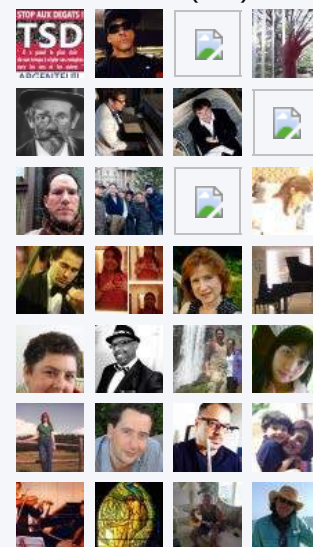
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premiered both the Waltz and Romance during the 2008/2009-concert season with great critical success and enthusiastic approval from Leyetchkiss.

About Scarlatti Recreated, Russo remarks, “The idea of ‘recreating’ Scarlatti originated primarily from the basic fact that his work wasn’t conceived for the modern piano but rather for the harpsichord.” Scarlatti’s most significant musical contribution is his oeuvre of 555 keyboard sonatas written for harpsichord, chronologically catalogued by the most comprehensive numbering system of his work, which was created by Ralph Kirkpatrick in 1953. With a strong sense for the historic component of pianism, Sandro Russo has enjoyed playing historic instruments and performing programs that position the pianistic experience into a solid historical context.

Obviously there was something in Scarlatti’s intimate and harmonious melodies that inspired a historic response, one which bears as much witness to the styles of the times in which the various transcriptions were written - virtuosic, romantic, and expressive - as it does to the subtleties of Scarlatti’s music itself.



Sandro Russo, Photo:Ilona Oltuski@getclassical

An inherent ingredient in a transcription is its complexity. Based on the source material, the transcription evokes the original but often tries to go beyond it, adding a personal commentary. This often results in adding harmonic voices or melodic embellishments, translating into intricate technical demands on the pianist. Russo’s disc features transcriptions of Scarlatti’s material by pianists of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Mid-nineteenth century transcriptionist Carl Czerny paid homage to Scarlatti along with other composers while he worked at the center of Viennese pianism. Piano virtuoso Carl Tausig and Louis Brassin, also best known for his Wagner transcriptions, added their own virtuosic flair to Scarlatti’s material, and included in their interpretations a fuller-ranged and polyphonic orchestral configuration of the original music. At the turn of the century, Enrique Granados set out to transcribe a set of Scarlatti Sonatas in a highly romanticized fashion of the time. Famed virtuoso and composer of the mid-twentieth century, Ignaz Friedman, was renowned for his Bach and Scarlatti transcriptions in addition to his Chopin performances; the Polish pianist brought a lot of Chopin’s harmonic influences into Scarlatti’s sound world. The compositions of the eccentric Charles-Valentin Alkan, a colleague of Chopin and part of the same French bohemian circle of the mid-nineteenth century, is known to test the limits of even the most virtuoso piano playing. He included references in one of his manuscripts to “Alla D. Scarlatti.” Slightly more interested in a historic view of the twentieth century are Jean Françaix, Raymond Leventhal, and Michael Habermann, each of whom approach

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Scarlatti with their personal historic perspective.

Russo's own revelations of fascinating details are projected with great sovereignty in Scarlatti Recreated, perhaps most brilliantly expressed in his performance of Marc-André Hamelin's Etude VI: Esercizio per Pianoforte (Omaggio a Domenico Scarlatti). Marc-André Hamelin is renowned for presenting the works of lesser-known composers (including Alkan's), and works with pieces that many deem difficult to handle, remaining unfazed by their tremendous intricacies. The contemporary pianist/composer and arranger makes, in his own words, "a purely affectionate tribute" to Scarlatti, as mentioned in the liner notes.

Russo manages to keep the listener engaged throughout the different 'quotations' of Scarlatti's underlying impact on the music's clarity and finesse, which aids the listener in grasping a deeper look into the curious process of musical composition, as well.

The recording is a poignant example of Russo's thoughtful and meaningful programs, executed with great imagination and musical dexterity.

### One Response to "Scarlatti Recreated"

Having attended Sandro Russo's recitals over the years, I believe he is definitely a world-class pianist who has tremendous potential to "shake the world". I definitely want to purchase his new recording of Scarlatti. Please help me.

Dr. Henry P. Sheng said this on December 6th, 2013 at 8:53 AM

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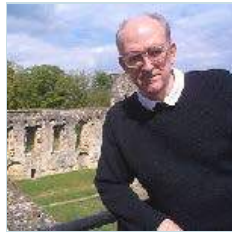
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## Turning Scarlatti on his head

by Michael Johnson

Michael Johnson is a music writer based in Bordeaux. He contributes music commentary to Facts & Arts, the International Herald Tribune, Boston Musical Intelligencer, Open Letters Monthly and Clavier Companion, among others. He is a former board member of the London International Piano Competition.

07.01.2014



6

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You would have to be quite a sure-footed composer to believe you could improve on something as perfect as the harpsichord sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti. These intensely vital pieces were crafted meticulously with beginnings, middles and ends, combining melody and harmony with the occasional daring touch of dissonance. Some 300 years after Scarlatti wrote his incredible 555 sonatas, most of them are still fresh and exciting.

Yet Scarlatti considered these works to be mere light-hearted entertainment, “jesting with art”, in his words. He urged listeners to be “more human than critical”.

In modern performances, Ivo Pogorelich and Vladimir Horowitz have set the bar high for piano versions, and other pianists must strive to reach their standards.

So it was with some skepticism that I switched on the new CD Scarlatti Recreated (Musical Concepts, MC149), which for the first time pulls together 19 examples of Scarlatti “recreations” – rewritings of some of the favorite sonatas. Purists can yelp and cry foul; I found real music of a similar yet different texture in these works.

Sicilian pianist Sando Russo has the skills, sensitivity and respect for Scarlatti required for navigating these reworkings, most of them more demanding pianistically than the originals.

He has collected a diverse selection of Scarlattish sonatas, some of which have appeared on other CDs, some of which are encore-type recital offerings, and two of which are getting their world premiere as recordings here.

Transcriptions in classical music are nothing new, but Russo’s picks are mostly purposeful – the 19<sup>th</sup> century transcribers sought to inject expanded pianoforte dynamics to the one-dimensional harpsichord sound, and in most cases update the music with contemporary ideas. Call them pastiches, homages or imitations, they all bring the familiar originals to mind but with a twist. None quite overflow into caricature.

Intentionally or not, Russo’s ordering of the pieces builds slowly from minor tinkering such as Carl Tausig’s up-tempo renderings of the E Major K. 20 and the C Major K. 487 to more personal expressions of Marc-André Hamelin and the delightful Jean Françaix, to the very contemporary (and my favorite) piece by the American Michael Habermann.

Attentive listeners will wonder what the excitement is all about through the first 12 pieces, then come the real departures. First, Ignaz Friedman with his melodic Pastorale, followed by his bouncy Gigue. And Hamelin’s version, described in the program notes as a “purely affectionate tribute”, although he admits the sonatas are “very easy to make fun of”.

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And the CD reaches a climax with Habermann's Homage, a strongly contemporary refitting of the original sonata L. 104. Habermann, a professor at the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University, is known for his scholarly work on Sorabji and his interpretations of contemporary works. He clearly enjoyed himself in this Homage. A sample is available here:

[http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00F0AIHS2/ref=dm\\_ws\\_sp\\_tlw\\_trk1\\_B00F0AIHS2](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00F0AIHS2/ref=dm_ws_sp_tlw_trk1_B00F0AIHS2)



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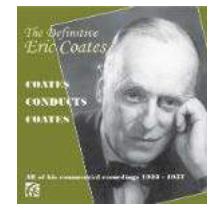
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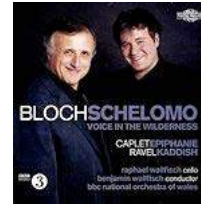
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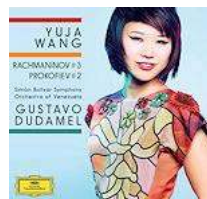
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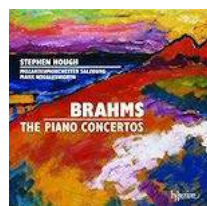
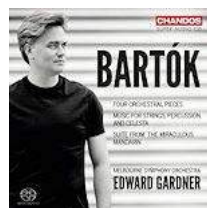
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Rachmaninov #3  
Prokofiev #2



Scarlatti Recreated  
Arrangements and homages to Scarlatti by Tausig, Brassin, Granados, Czerny, Friedman, Alkan, Hamelin, Françaix, Lewenthal and Habermann (see end of review for full track-listing)  
Sandro Russo (piano)  
rec. 28 November 2012 and 19 February 2013, Oktaven Studios, New York City, USA  
MUSICAL CONCEPTS MC 149 [61:46]

Sandro Russo's *Scarlatti Recreated* brings together nineteen arrangements, expansions, and homages to Domenico Scarlatti. Some of the composers just wanted to "update" Scarlatti's writing so that it fits the piano better; some endeavoured to make them harder to play; some were simply fascinated by Scarlatti and his art. This album is similar in concept to Joseph Moog's recent *Scarlatti Illuminated* (they have three tracks in common), only Russo's playing is more consistently outstanding.

Russo, I should emphasize, really is outstanding. He proves a great guide to the different transcribers and their styles. The second of Louis Brassin's arrangements is a merry romp, calling to mind not just Scarlatti but Couperin. Enrique Granados is a superb arranger, and he imposes less of himself on the music than certain others, particularly Ignaz Friedman. When I reviewed Joseph Moog's album, I said Friedman's pastorale after Scarlatti sounded more like Scriabin; here it takes on an almost jazzy aspect, or at least Percy Grainger-ish.

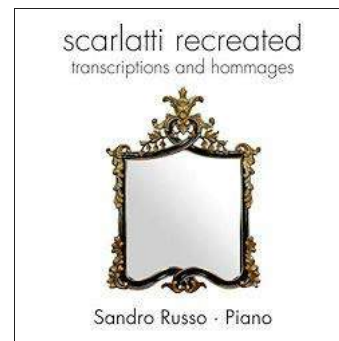
Jean Françaix contributes a typically witty homage which includes quotations by composers who are not Scarlatti. What did you expect from a work called *Promenade of an Eclectic Musicologist*? Marc-André Hamelin also lives up to expectations, in that his tribute is staggeringly difficult to play and loaded with amusing dissonance. Raymond Lewenthal's comparatively straight homage ends with an Ives-like "wrong" chord.

Russo's skills as a programmer must also be praised. Not many pianists would include notorious study-music writer Carl Czerny, who gets a world-premiere recording for his own brilliant mimicry of Scarlatti's style. The seven Enrique Granados pieces are skilfully arranged into a suite, the "slow movement" (from K. 109 in A minor) moving so seamlessly into the finale (from K. 211 in A major) that you'll surely be dazzled.

The pianist's Hamburg Steinway is consistently pure in tone, and the recorded sound cannot be criticized. It's fitting that this is released on the label Musical Concepts, since it is a concept album of the best kind.

Brian Reinhart

- Full Track-Listing  
Carl Tausig (1841-1871)  
Capriccio in E (Scarlatti Sonata K. 20)  
Sonata in C (Scarlatti Sonata K. 487)  
Louis Brassin (1840-1884)  
Andante in B flat minor (Sonata K. 377)  
Scherzo in F (Sonata K. 525)  
Enrique Granados (1867-1916)  
From the 26 Sonatas Inéditas

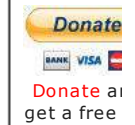


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gorgeous cascade of arpeggios near the end. Her phrasing is compelling. Her voicing in Elinor Remick Warren's transcriptions of Stephen Foster songs is subtle and poetic, but when virtuosity is called for in the bigger transcriptions, she has that as well.

The recording was made at DePauw University, where Phang is Professor of Music. The warm acoustic does justice to her ravishing tone, from a richness in the bass to a spine-tingling ping at the top. I listened to this three times without being able to take it off. This is a pianist to watch.

SULLIVAN

### Menahem Pressler

SCHUBERT: *Sonata, D 894*; MOZART: *Rondo, K 511*; BEETHOVEN *Bagatelles, op 126*  
La Dolce Volta 12—75 minutes

This new label's philosophy is worth quoting in full: "La Dolce Volta wants to change people's perceptions of CDs so that they see them as luxury items. The label's strategy is based on the unique pairing between a work and the artist and the secret connection between them. Each release will be designed as a work of art to create a notion of elegant rarity and a desire to belong to a club of musical epicureans. It will be the result of a unique collaboration with an artist whose work will be like a jewelry box for the recordings."

Once the outer wrapper is removed there is a cardboard band to come off before you access the contents. Removing that you find several large photographs of Pressler caught in jovial mood. The number increases in the attached booklet. The notes are in four languages and tell us both about the pianist and the music.

At the golden age of 90 we might reasonably expect some evidence of technical problems. This is not the case in any of these performances. Granted, the music does not require the virtuosic effort of a Liszt Sonata or the Chopin Etudes. It does require a high level of musicianship and a knowledge of the craftsmanship of composition. Pressler trumps most other performances when it comes to expression and the ability to accurately recreate what is at the heart of a composer's thoughts.

Schubert's sonata is one of inward expression. It moves at a stately pace, with even the final Allegretto well manageable to all but the most insensitive fingers. This is a perfectly lovely performance with special attention paid to detail, along with structure. Exciting it's not, though Schubert in reserve is still something to take great pleasure in.

The famous Rondo is chock full of lovingly executed embellishments. Once again Pressler keeps us spellbound by his ability to caress the

American Record Guide

keyboard and his varied touch. It is only with the second Bagatelle that we come across an Allegro. Even the Presto of the fourth Bagatelle displays his accuracy of execution. The music does not call for sustaining speed for long durations. It is also true that a studio recording also allows for retakes when something goes amiss. I prefer to believe that Pressler chose works he was comfortable with and found little necessity for redoing any of it.

Given the excellence of sound, recorded this past May at Indiana University, and the quality of presentation, this becomes, like the man himself, something to cherish.

BECKER

### Bosendorfer Sound

DEBUSSY: *Cathedrale Engloutie; Nocturne; Reflets dans l'Eau*; RAVEL: *Jeux d'Eau; Une Barque sur l'Ocean*; BENNETT: *Barcarolle*; LISZT: *Harmories du Soir*; GRANADOS: *Maiden & Nightingale*; GRIFFES: *Fountain of Acqua Paola; Barcarolle*; CHOPIN: *Nocturne, op 55:2*

Carol Rosenberger, p—Delos 3460—71 minutes

Fabulous recorded piano sound from Rosenberger's Bosendorfer Imperial Grand. The works have all been released before in *Night Moods* (Delos 3030, Sept/Oct 1989), *Singing on the Water* (Delos 3172, May/June 1996), and *Water Music of the Impressionists* (1983). She has the technique to bring all of these works off very well, clearly a great piano, and her own label to record everything with state of the art technology. Even the 1983 pieces stand up quite well against the newer recordings.

The Imperial Grand has 97 keys; it extends down from the normal low A to the C below. I have seen the G only available on this piano used by Bartok (Piano Concerto 2), and Rosenberger admits she couldn't resist using the lowest C in the middle section of Debussy's 'Sunken Cathedral'. Her octave doubling creates a sound I have never heard before, and I've been playing the piece for nearly 50 years. If you are unfamiliar with her playing, or simply want a great sounding piano disc, here it is.

HARRINGTON

### Scarlatti Recreated

Tausig, Brassi, Granados, Czerny+  
Sandro Russo, p

Musical Concepts 149—62 minutes

A romp in the form of a recital: 19 arrangements of or homages to the great Domenico Scarlatti, whose keyboard music is so perfectly suited to the piano that I'm tempted to call him the first great composer for it. The program runs the gamut from the respectful but virtuosically souped-up arrangements by Carl Tausig of K 20 (E) and K 487 (C) to the hilarious

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and compositionally clever *Homage* by my erstwhile classmate at Peabody Conservatory, Michael Habermann (best known, perhaps, for his pioneering performances of Sorabji in the 1980s but clearly also an accomplished composer). In between these extremes we have somewhat schmaltzy treatments by Ignaz Friedman, a fiendishly difficult (and in the end too cutesy) etude by Marc-André Hamelin, as well as fine works by Francaix, Granados, Alkan, and Raymond Lewenthal. The young Sicilian pianist Sandro Russo has more than enough technique for these punishing miniatures; his sensitivity and penetrating tone speak volumes for his artistry overall. Sound is excellent.

HASKINS

### Duo Scaramouche

MILHAUD: *Scaramouche*; BRAHMS: *Haydn Variations*; FALLA: *2 Dances fr La Vida Breve*; RAVEL: *Rapsodie Espagnole*

Malvina Renault-Vieville & Filippo Antonelli, p  
Maguelone 111.151—51 minutes

One would certainly expect a duo named after a famous composition to play it well, and so begins this program. Milhaud's *Scaramouche* (1937) is a three-movement, 10-minute work for two pianos full of verve and charm. It comes my way on a very regular basis and never fails to please. The Brahms is a core piece in the two-piano repertoire, as is Ravel's *Rapsodie Espagnole*. Only the Falla Dances (transcriptions by Gustave Samazeuilh) are rarities. The Duo was formed in 1992, and this was recorded in their 10th anniversary year.

The performances are strong. Tight ensemble and many pianistic colors bring new interest to familiar works. I especially enjoyed their rhythmic drive and forward momentum. The sound here is OK—the microphones seem a little too far away for my taste. The booklet notes are good, but the English translation is less than perfect. This is a well balanced and very well performed two-piano recital of core repertoire.

HARRINGTON

### Autograph

Alexandre Tharaud, p  
Erato 934137—69 minutes

There is nothing objectionable about this recording of assorted encores. Tharaud's playing is confident and secure; his technical abilities are never in doubt, but because he consistently takes a standard, unadventurous approach to this repertoire, it is doubtful whether many listeners will be particularly interested in this record.

There are 23 assorted short pieces by composers ranging from Couperin, Rameau, Bach,

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and Scarlatti to Satie, Tailleferre, Mompou and Poulenc. The works chosen are perfect charming, if unsurprising and unchallenging. If the playing is sure, it remains, nevertheless essentially uninspired.

VIG

### American Masterpieces

BOLCOM: *Recuerdos*; COPLAND: *El Salon Mexico*; BRUBECK: *Points on Jazz*; BERNSTEIN: *Arias & Barcarolles*

Wang-Rogers Piano Duo  
Albany 1427—78 minutes

This is a brilliant collection of piano music for four hands by American composers. We get a South of the Border influence in the *Recuerdos*. *Three Traditional Latin-American Dances* from 1991 by Bolcom. It is also there in Bernstein's four-hands arrangement of Copland's great 1932 orchestral work. Brubeck's 1968 eight-movement mini-ballet is a set of great jazz pieces that occasionally recall some of his best-known compositions. Bernstein's piece employs a huge variety of styles: jazz, pop, 12-tone, Hebrew songs, blues, musical theater, and late romanticism. The first three works are characterized by sharp rhythms and highly accented piano playing. While subtle nuances are never missed, the music only calls for them occasionally. I also hear the influence of Gershwin all through this program, and I believe that all four composers represented here have or would unabashedly acknowledge that.

Bernstein composed *Arias and Barcarolles* in 1988; it is considered his final major work. There are eight songs with Bernstein's own texts, and it owes a little to Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben* in that it follows the relationship between a husband and wife over a lifetime. Schumann's female singer with pianist here becomes male and female singers and two pianists at one piano. It is a perfectly designed piece to bring everyone together in a duo singer recital. The husband and wife team of Bradley and Jennifer Robinson join the Wang-Rogers duo for a very effective performance of this stylistically scattered work. Their voices are pleasant and diction is very good (no texts in the booklet).

I can hear the interaction between the singers and assume that there is acting going on, so I expect this work would be most effective in concert or recital.

HARRINGTON

### Bach to the Future

Bach, Berg, Barber, Beethoven  
Ashley Wass, p—Orchid 33—79 minutes


In his entertaining notes Wass describes this program as a kind of nod to celebrity numbers

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## Sandro Russo: Scarlatti Recreated

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...ing release.  
HARRINGTON

### Souvenirs

BARBER: *Souvenirs*; BRAHMS: 16 Waltzes, op 39;  
GRANADOS: *En la Aldea*; SATIE: 3 Pieces in the  
Form of a Pear

Tonya Lemoh & Cathrine Penderup, p  
Danacord 746—73 minutes

This is a big, full program of piano duet music by mainstream composers, but the works are not heard anywhere near often enough. Barber's *Souvenirs* is the only work here that I've heard performed in concert (John Browning & Leonard Slatkin). Even the better-known Brahms Waltzes are usually passed over in favor of the even better-known Hungarian Dances. Lemoh & Penderup are to be praised for their repertoire selection as much as for their perfect ensemble, musicality, and exciting performances.

Opening with the enigmatic Satie is unusual and very effective. Supposedly Satie had been criticized in his use of musical form, so he chose the title "in the Form of a Pear" in response. The 3 Morceaux are actually seven pieces, too. Immediately noticeable in this performance is the very wide dynamic range. Lemoh & Penderup contrast the loudest crashing chords with almost inaudible whisperings—and everything in between. The Brahms Waltzes have the requisite stylized dance feel, but also the flexibility of tempo required to bring off these wonderful pieces with just the right panache.

The Granados was completely new to me. Events in the country village of Aldea inspired 10 movements divided into two parts. Charming, simple, even a little naive, these piano duets fall into the same group as well-known French duet suites like Fauré's *Dolly* or Debussy's *Petite Suite*. Lemoh & Penderup never over-play here and let these wonderful pieces simply work their magic.

Barber's suite of six dances finishes off the program in great fashion. *Souvenirs* was completed in its original piano duet form in 1952. It is, like so much of Barber's music, lyrical, expressive, and tonal. He was later commissioned to orchestrate them for a ballet. The composer wrote that "one might imagine a divertissement in a setting reminiscent of the Palm Court of the Hotel Plaza in New York, the

... about 20 minutes of great music. Good sound on this Danish recording and complete booklet notes complete a most enjoyable release.

HARRINGTON

### After a Reading of Liszt

LISZT: *Ballade 2*; *Ernani Paraphrase*; LIAPOUNOV: *Transcendental Etude, op 11:12*;  
CHOPIN: *Etudes, op 10*; PIANA: *Apres une Lecture de Liszt*—Antonio Pompa-Baldi

2 Pianists 1039305—72 minutes

I like the idea behind this album better than I like the album itself. The wonderful Italian virtuoso Antonio Pompa-Baldi has recorded a recital program where all of the works share some relation to the music of Liszt. Chopin, for instance, dedicated his first set of 12 etudes to Liszt, who was the only pianist in 1833 capable of playing them well. The Russian composer Liapounov attempted to complete Liszt's 12 *Transcendental Etudes* by composing new studies in keys the great Hungarian composer omitted.

Pompa-Baldi's performance of standard repertory is for the most part excellent. He plays the Chopin Etudes with just the right mix of polish, power, and ferocity. The one exception is the A-minor chromatic study, Op. 10:2, which is inexplicably slow. He plays Liszt's *Ballade No. 2* and *Ernani Concert Paraphrase* with passion and drama, and he's excellent in Liapounov's final, knuckle-busting *Transcendental Etude*.

The album concludes with contemporary composer Roberto Piana's *Apres une Lecture de Liszt* (After a Reading of Liszt), which plays off the name of Liszt's own *Apres une Lecture de Dante* (Dante Sonata). The title is a rip-off, and so is the music, a pastiche of Liszt-inspired, keyboard-pounding kitsch. Pompa-Baldi plays this monstrosity with technical bravura, but no amount of skill can tame this beast.

PITCHER

### Russian Gems

MEDTNER: *Piano Sonata 1*; BALAKIREV: *Islamey*;  
RACHMANINOFF: *Waltz & Romance fr Suite 2*;  
TANEYEV: *Prelude & Fugue*; ISSERLIS: *Fairy Tale*;  
RAKOV: *Russian Song*; ROZYCKI: *Waltz*

Sandro Russo, p

Musical Concepts 150—69 minutes

I love Russian piano music and it occupies a

205

disproportionate number of shelves in my CD collection. I was both pleased and surprised by the content of this program. Balakirev's *Islamey* is not a rarity. It was known to Liszt and to almost every pianist with a desire for a showy, difficult recital closer or encore since. I learned it from an old Turnabout LP by Alfred Brendel, of all people. Russo's playing is on a level with the best.

Medtner's big, four-movement Sonata 1 (over 30 minutes) is his first large-scale composition. It prompted Rachmaninoff to remark that all composers make mistakes when they are young, but that "only Medtner, from the beginning, published works that would be hard to equal in later life". I have been quite pleased with several recordings of this work (Stewart on Grand Piano 617, Jan/Feb 2013; Milne on Brilliant 8851, May/June 2009; Hamelin on Hyperion 67221, Jan/Feb 1999). Russo's performance can stand with the best.

Taneyev's *Prelude and Fugue* is one of only a few piano solo works he assigned an opus number to and published. Performances of this exceptionally difficult work (at least the Fugue) are few and tend to be almost exclusively by Russian-trained pianists. Ashkenazy still has the best recording of this (Decca, Mar/Apr 2007), but I'll always welcome a recording as good as the current one.

The program opens with the absolutely gorgeous Isserlis 'Fairy Tale' ('Skaza'—a title often used by Medtner). I was floored at the solo piano transcription by Leyetchkiss of the middle two movements from Rachmaninoff's Suite 2 for Two Pianos. This is a well-known and often recorded work for piano duos, but never for a solo pianist. How Russo manages to play that Waltz is beyond me. In the original, at a Presto tempo, each pianist plays the main theme a third apart while waltz accompaniment is split between them. I can see playing the accompaniment with one hand, but the melody in thirds with one hand? You have to hear this to believe it. Actually, if you heard this performance in the background, you'd simply think it was the original. Listen closely, and a few logistical matters make the arrangement sound a little different from the two-piano original—but not by much. Same goes for the Romance movement, but at its slower speed you simply enjoy the music and appreciate the performance without having to pick your jaw up off the floor. Two beautiful transcriptions by Grigory Ginzburg finish off this marvelous disc. Both the Rakov Song and the Rozycki Waltz were new to me and quite enjoyable.

These great sounding recordings were made in New York (October 2012 to January

2013). There are excellent and extensive program notes.

HARRINGTON

### Grigory Sokolov

**BEETHOVEN:** *Piano Sonatas 7, 27, 32*; **ARAPOV:** *Sonata; Concerto for Violin, Piano, & Percussion*; **SCRIABIN:** *Sonata 3*

with Mikhail Vaiman, v; Nikolay Moskalenko, perc; Leningrad Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra/ Alexander Dmitriev

Melodiya 2240 [2CD] 130 minutes

Grigory Sokolov was the winner of the third Tchaikovsky competition in 1966 at the age of 16. Now in his mid-60s, he maintains a busy concert schedule (from 3 to 11 recitals each month, in different European cities). Reviews of this year's all-Chopin recitals are uniformly superb, yet we here in the US have not seen or heard this great pianist very often. The new Melodiya releases should help rectify that. The hyperbole in the booklet notes placing Sokolov on the same level as Horowitz, Richter, and Gould doesn't fly with me. He is, nevertheless, a fine pianist worth getting to know better.

Last issue's Bach (Melodiya 2049) was a 2CD set with many of the strengths and weaknesses found in the current release. Soviet recordings from the 1970s and 80s can be cleaned up sonically, repackaged, and presented in a manner justifying world distribution—as they are here. There is still audience noise (in the concert recordings), poor recording equipment, and questionable microphone placement. English translations of the booklet are much improved these days, as are most of the booklet essays. As noted, there are still some of the old Soviet-era superlative phrases that seem out of place. Tell me what he has done, where and for how long.

The two discs in this release couldn't be more different in terms of repertoire. Three Beethoven sonatas on the first CD contrast with a big early Scriabin sonata, one written in 1978 by Boris Arapov (1905-1992), and the same composer's fascinating Concerto for Violin, Piano and Percussion with Chamber Orchestra. The Beethoven sonatas are a studio recording from 1974 and two recital recordings from 1987 and 1988. The Scriabin and Arapov are studio recordings from 1972 and 1985. The concerto is from a concert in 1974. As you might imagine, even with excellent remastering efforts, there is a wide divergence in recording quality here. But Sokolov's always interesting and perceptive performances make the whole package very much worthwhile.

I found his Beethoven reminiscent of Ashkenazy's, who, as the previous winner of the Tchaikovsky competition would have been of the same Soviet-era school of Russian

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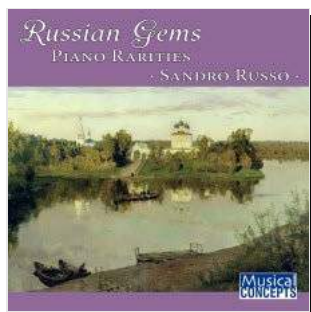
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## A Russian Recital by Sandro Russo

Review by: Jed Distler



Artistic Quality: 8  
Sound Quality: 8

As pianist Sandro Russo readily admits, not all of the "Russian Gems" compiled for his recital are "Piano Rarities". Certainly not Balakirev's frequently recorded Islamey, or even the less frequently recorded Medtner First Sonata and Taneyev Prelude and Fugue. More importantly, however, the selections add up to an interesting and well-contrasted program, and Russo commands the technique and temperament to make it work.

The opening Skazka by Julius Isserlis might be described as Edward MacDowell à la Russe. In contrast to Sam Haywood's gentle, rounded off

interpretation on Hyperion, Russo animates the middle section with sharper accents and bolder dynamic contrasts. His assured and colorful Medtner Op. 5 yields nothing to Marc-André Hamelin's reference recording, and arguably surpasses it in the Allegro risoluto finale in terms of more varied articulation in the busy opening pages and more ferocity in the climaxes.

Russo's masterful unfolding of Taneyev's difficult Prelude and Fugue in G-sharp minor is the best I've heard since Vladimir Ashkenazy. He matches the older pianist's suavity and clear voicing of the Fugue, while intensifying the Prelude's long-lined melodies with dynamic surges and emphatic accents that contrast to Ashkenazy's softer-grained introspection. While we miss the spatial effect and conversational repartée of Rachmaninov's two-piano writing in the Op. 18 Suite's Waltz and Romance—reduced to 10 fingers by Vladimir Leytchkiss—Russo compromises nothing in the way of tempo, and his double notes are as smooth as silk.

Although Russo nails Islamey's swarms of notes and unrelenting big chords, I miss Gary Graffman's steel-cut fingerwork and driving momentum, not to mention Michele Campanella's more playful, supple, and textually lean version (once credited to Joyce Hatto). It's nice to hear the Gregori Ginzburg Rakov Russian Song and Rózycki Waltz transcriptions revived. On the other hand, Ginzburg's old recording of the latter abounds with carefully sculpted inner voices and a sophisticated foreground/background interplay that Russo's relatively uniform and less thoughtfully structured reading lacks. A very attractive disc, overall.

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### Recording Details:

Album Title: Russian Gems Piano Rarities  
Reference Recording: None for this collection

Works by Isserlis, Medtner, Taneyev, Sandro Russo (piano)  
Rachmaninov, Balakirev, Rakov, & Rózycki

[Musical Concepts](#) - 150



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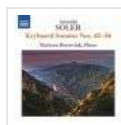
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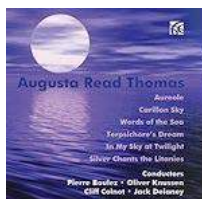
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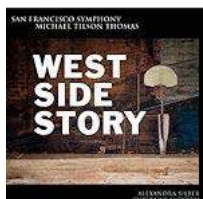
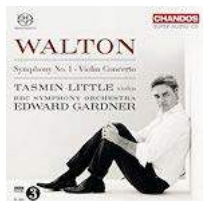
### REVIEW

Some items to consider

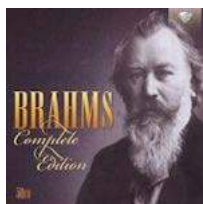
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Russian Gems Piano Rarities  
 Julius ISSERLIS (1888-1968)  
 Fairy Tale (Skazka) in F Major, Op.6 [3:11]  
 Nikolai MEDTNER (1880-1951)  
 Sonata No.1 in F Minor, Op.5 [30:18]  
 Sergei TANEYEV (1856-1915)  
 Prelude and Fugue in G-Sharp Minor, Op.29 [7:06]  
 Sergei RACHMANINOV (1873-1943)  
 Waltz and Romance from suite No.2 for two pianos, Op.17 (transc. Vladimir Leyetchkiss) [13:18]  
 Mily BALAKIREV (1937-1910)  
 Islamey (Oriental Fantasy), op.18 [8:42]  
 Nikolai RAKOV (1908-1990)  
 Russian folk Song (transc. Grigory Ginzburg) [2:01]  
 Ludomir RÓZYCKI (1883-1953)  
 Waltz from the opera Casanova (transc. Grigory Ginzburg) [3:59]  
 Sandro Russo (piano)  
 rec. Oktaven Studios, New York City, USA, 3 October, 19 December 2012, 28 January 2013.  
 MUSICAL CONCEPTS MC 150 [68:37]

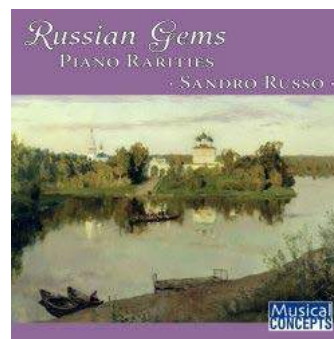
This is a brilliant disc with a really arresting programme though with a couple of anomalies. I'm sure that Islamey is too well known to be considered a rarity while I trust the same can be said for Medtner's Sonata No.1. As admitted in the booklet notes, Rózycki is not Russian, but these are small quibbles. While these works could have been replaced with other real rarities perhaps we can hope for more discs of such repertoire. Reading pianist Sandro Russo's own notes later I see that he has pointed out that the Medtner Sonata is better known these days but only following recent "rediscovery" as he puts it and that Islamey is "widely performed".

The disc opens with a true rarity in the shape of Skazka or Fairy Tale by Moldavian-Jewish composer Julius Isserlis (grandfather of cellist Steven Isserlis). I had never come across his music before and it is truly delightful but at a mere three minutes leaves you with all kinds of questions not least of which is 'When can I hear some more?'. The answer lies in a disc only released in January 2014, Julius Isserlis: Piano Music played by Sam Heywood (piano) and Steven Isserlis (cello). It's [Hyperion CDA68025](#). The piece is charming, dreamy and elusive, evoking in my imagination a sparkling and gently flowing waterfall.

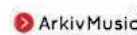
With Medtner I am in the musical equivalent of seventh heaven. When I listen to his piano music I always feel transported. He is one of my piano music heroes and his first piano sonata is one of my absolute favourites. It is the longest and most substantial work on the disc. Medtner began writing it while he was still studying at the Moscow Conservatoire under Taneyev and Arensky. He completed it, aged 23, in 1903, a staggering feat since the music is so mature in concept and execution. The opening Allegro is toweringly majestic and tempestuous demanding some thunderously played passages. Add to this an extremely memorable theme. The brief Intermezzo relieves the tension somewhat before the Largo divoto reveals the serious nature at the heart of the work with elements of spiritual reflection. With some plangent and pellucid moments you can almost 'see' into the composer's soul. The finale marked Allegro risoluto draws the themes and ideas together and indeed resolves them as well as the conflict within them. Taken as a whole this sonata is quite extraordinary in its breadth of ideas and the emotional depths it plumbs. It is an example of a work that is pretty well perfect without a note too few or too many.

As the liner-notes point out one of the unifying themes of this disc is that all the music is by composer-pianists. They don't come much more so than Sergei Taneyev whose pupils included Isserlis, Medtner, Rachmaninov, Scriabin and Glière and whose teachers were Nikolai Rubinstein and Tchaikovsky. The Prelude and Fugue in G-Sharp Minor, Op.29 shows Taneyev's devotion to Bach and the baroque in a quite breathtakingly virtuosic work that makes great demands on the pianist as he is driven at

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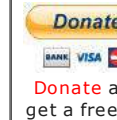


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## RUSSIAN GEMS: PIANO RARITIES – SANDRO RUSSO, PIANO

POSTED BY PAUL BALLYK ON JUN 12, 2014 IN ROMANTIC | 1 COMMENT

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### Recommendation

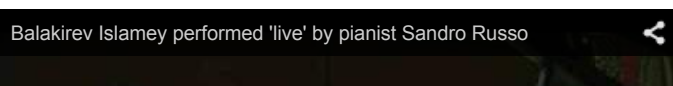
The sparkling opening bars of "Russian Gems" define the program of this Musical Concepts CD, one that is superbly performed by Sicilian pianist Sandro Russo. The concept behind this project is to "showcase the Romantic tradition in Russian music" (Russo), and features works by some composers I have not heard of before as well as some rarities by Rachmaninov and Medtner.

Space does not allow for even a cursory overview of the lives of each of these composers. Collectively, the span of their productive lives runs from the late Romantic period with Sergei Taneyev (1856-1915) and Mily Balakirev (1837-1910) well into the 20th century with the music of Julius Isserlis (1888-1968) and Nikolai Rakov (1908-1990). To my ear, the largest unifying aspect of the music here is that each of these composers was a virtuosic pianist, a facet of their talents you can hear in the music. Some of these pieces, such as the opening *Fairy Tale, Op. 6* by Julius Isserlis (1888-1968) are soft, charming miniatures, redolent of French Impressionism while others, the sweeping *Sonata No. 1, Op. 5* by Nikolai Medtner for example, are full of Romantic passion and 'on the edge' pianism.

The sample in the sidebar for you to hear is a transcription by Grigory Ginzburg of a Waltz from the opera *Casanova* by Ludomir Różycki. You can also listen to *Islamey* by Mili Balakirev in the video below.

Sandro Russo handles it all without a blink. As far as I recall, I have not come across his name prior to encountering this CD, but I assure you, he is a pianist of extraordinary technical and artistic abilities. Captured in splendid sound on recordings dating from 2012 and 2013, this sixty-eight minute program will appeal to just about any music lover. If you enjoy the music of the composers you know here - Rachmaninov and perhaps Balakirev and Medtner - you will enjoy the entire program.

Pianist Sandro Russo performs *Islamey* by Mili Balakirev.



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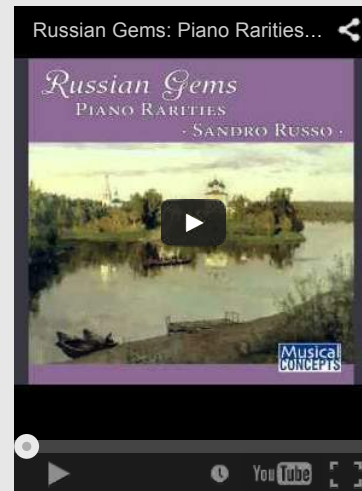
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## 1 COMMENT



### GIL FIELDS

Bravo!!!!!!!!!! Superb performance. I love Russian Romantic composition of known composers and unknown composers bring a much welcomed surprise.

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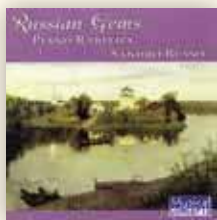
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## Russische pareltjes en een Siciliaanse tovenaars

De bescheiden Siciliaanse pianovirtuoos Sandro Russo zou zijn nieuwste, deels in eigen beheer geproduceerde cd *Russian Gems* niet treffender kunnen openen dan met een volstrekt onbekend juweeltje van de Russische-Joodse componist Julian Isserlis (1888-1968). Met precies gelaagde dynamiek en een verfijnde zweem pedaal weeft Russo een magisch klanktapijt uit dit ogenschijnlijk niemendalletje. Waar hij het vandaan haalt blijft uiteindelijk een raadsel. Echte tover laat zich nu eenmaal niet verklaren.

Dit album laat inderdaad een bijzondere persoonlijkheid horen. Dat begint al met de repertoirekeus. Het enige echt bekende werk op dit album is de Mily Balakirevs *Islamey*, voor de rest gaat het om muziek die je zelden of nooit in de concertzaal hoort. Russo laat veelgehoord effectbejag volledig varen ten dienste van een vloeiende stemvoering. Ook in Medtners weinig gespeelde sonate opus 5 volgen Russo's tempo's het momentum van de melodie. Volledig drijvend op de natuurlijke stuwung van Medtners lyriek laat hij 'als het om samenhang gaat, zelfs Marc-André Hamelin achter zich. De coda van het eerste deel speelt Hamelin (Hyperion) bijvoorbeeld met veel tempowisselingen en panache, maar het is Russo die de ingenieuze muzikale constructie werkelijk uit de doeken doet door teugels strak te houden en geen akkoordaccent de overhand te laten nemen. De belofte die de polyfone Finale uit Medtners sonate doet komt in Russo's vertolking van Taneyevs prelude en fuga opus 29 volledig uit. Russo mag dan niet de tomeloze fysieke kracht van een Ashkenazy (Decca) aan de dag leggen, maar de ontzagwekkende helderheid waarmee hij de woest gestapelde stemmen belicht zorgt voor een ongehoorde climaxwerking.

Vladimir Leyetchkiss' razend knappe solotranscriptie van Rachmaninoff's Suite opus 17, hoorden we al eerder door niemand minder dan Cyprien Katsaris (Piano 21). Russo vertolkt de twee middendelen die Leyetchkiss aanvankelijk op zichzelf uitgaf. Ook hier zijn de transparantie en gloedvolle passie van een overdonderende gratie. Grigory Ginzburgs transcripties die deze cd besluiten zijn in het Westen evenzo

weinig bekend als het werkje van Isserlis dat dit recital opende. Russo laat horen hoe onterecht dat is.

Maar verreweg het grootste muzikale onrecht is wel dat het Nederlandse publiek Sandro Russo in de concertzaal moet missen bij gebrek aan interesse van onze vaderlandse concertorganisatoren.

Elger Niels

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## Debut-cd van de 8-jarige Serena Wang

'Het zal je kind maar wezen... jeh,

jehjeh, jeh' Wie kent deze klassieker niet, door Adèle Bloemendaal, Piet Römer en Leen Jongewaard onvergetelijk vastgelegd. Deze gedachte kwam onmiddellijk naar boven toen het schijfje van het - toen - 8 jarige Chinese wonderkind binnenkwam. Temeer daar ik bij de laatste paar uren van de opnamesessie in Hilversum aanwezig kon zijn. Een verslag daarvan staat in *Pianowereld* 6/ 2013. Nu dan het eindresultaat. En dat liegt er niet om!

De keuze van het repertoire is even begrijpelijk als verrassend. Begrijpelijk omdat we luisteren naar een meisje van acht jaar. Wie anders kan de diverse, meestal Chinese stukjes, zo goed aanvoelen en weergeven als deze Serena. De eerste zeven tracks bevatten louter Chinese stukjes, geschreven voor kinderen. Ook haar pianodocent, Dan Zhao Yi, leverde zijn compositorische bijdrage met *Beautiful flower in it's full glory*. Zo'n prachtige bloem in prille glorie is Serena zeker. Met name in deze Chinese stukjes is zij 'echt wie ze is'. Maar ook in *Dolly's Dreaming* van de Duitse componist Theodore Oesten ( 1813-1870) bewijst ze gevoel te hebben voor de inhoud van het werkje.

Shostakovich schreef zijn *Dances of the Dolls* in 1952/53. Dat dit niet zomaar kinderlijke niemendalletjes zijn bewijst o.a. Vladimir Ashkenazy. Een kritische vergelijking met Serena Wang zou niet eerlijk zijn. Maar toch, haar onbevangen speelwijze en technische perfectie is

wonderbaarlijk. Dat geldt ook voor *Villageoises*, *Petites Pièces Infantines* van Poulenc. Fris met een subtiel pedaalgebruik opgenomen.

De minder bekende sonate in F, KV 280 wordt door Serena 'netjes' en accuraat gespeeld. Maar dan komt het echte werk: *Liebestraum* nr. 3 van Liszt. Daar kun je niet mee sjoemelen. De beperkte spanwijdte van haar nog jonge handjes is een vast gegeven. Serena zal ongetwijfeld van haar docent aanwijzingen hebben gekregen om hiermee om te gaan. Het resultaat is een bewonderenswaardige uitvoering zonder risico's, zeker gezien haar technische mogelijkheden op deze jonge leeftijd. Als slotstuk op deze cd nog zo'n overbekend werk, de *Fantasia Impromptu* van Chopin. Naar mijn smaak met soms te veel pedaal, maar met een duidelijk inzicht in de belangrijke accenten, met name in de rechterhand, van de duim naar de pink (zie partituur). Is er dan niets aan te merken? Jazeker. Ik ben zo vrij om mijn verbazing te uiten over de wijze waarop Serena met name in de linkerhand soms een enkele toon speelt die afwijkt van de partituur, zowel in *Liebestraum* als in de *Fantasia Impromptu*. Ze doet dat overigens consequent binnen het verloop van het stuk. Dat moet haar docent die tijdens de drie opnamedagen aanwezig was toch gehoord hebben? Voor mij een open vraag.

Toen deze cd even ter sprake kwam in het programma van Hans Halfmans op radio 4, kon men er niet omheen. Een kind van 8 jaar, zo gedreven om de beste te worden in de pianistenwereld van morgen (haar grote voorbeeld is Lang Lang). Is dit wel goed voor de algemene ontwikkeling van zo'n jong meisje tot volwassen vrouw? Niemand had een sluitend antwoord maar wel bedenkingen. Dat is vanuit onze Westerse optiek begrijpelijk, maar daar wordt in het huidige China heel anders over gedacht. Dat is duidelijk.

Deze cd zal ongetwijfeld zijn weg vinden naar de consument. De verrassende repertoirekeuze, de mooie heldere opnametechniek en natuurlijk de onbevangen speelwijze van Serena Wang staan daar borg voor. Voor het volgen van Serena, met de *Fantasia Impromptu*: zie [www.channelclassics.com](http://www.channelclassics.com).

Frans C. Schulze

*Productie en distributie: Channel Classics Records, Channel of China, CCS 81014*

## TRANSLATION PIANOWERELD REVIEW OF “RUSSIAN GEMS” CD

### Russian Gems by a Sicilian Wizard

The unpretentious Sicilian virtuoso Sandro Russo could hardly have chosen a more apt opening to his latest CD Russian Gems (produced partly in-house) than the totally unknown gem of Russian-Jewish composer Julian Isserlis (1888-1968). With preciously layered dynamics and a refined shade of pedal Russo weaves a magic carpet out of this seemingly trifle. How he does it ultimately remains a mystery. Real magic does not allow for simple explanations.

This album showcases a remarkable personality. Starting with the repertoire choice: The only really known work on this album is Mily Balakirev's *Islamey*, the rest of the music is rarely, if ever heard in the concert hall. Russo sets sensationalism aside in order to focus on smooth voice leading. In Medtner's rarely played sonata opus 5 Russo's tempos follow the tune's momentum. Fully floating on the natural stream of Medtner's lyricism, he can even leave Marc-André Hamelin behind, when it comes to coherence. Hamelin plays the coda of the first movement with a lot of panache and many changes of pace, but it's Russo who unveils the ingenious musical construction by keeping a tight rein on tempo and accentuation. The promise of the polyphonic Finale to Medtner's sonata comes true in Russo's rendition of Taneyev's *Prelude and Fugue* opus 29. Russo may not have the physical strength of an Ashkenazy (Decca), but the awesome clarity with which he highlights the ferociously piled up voices creates a unique climax itself.

We had already encountered Vladimir Leyetchkiss' very clever solo transcription of Rachmaninoff's *Suite Opus 17* on a CD by none other than Cyprien Katsaris (Piano 21). Russo plays the two middle parts Leyetchkiss initially issued. Again, the transparency and passion are of overpowering grace. Grigory Ginzburg transcriptions concluding this CD are just as little known in the West, as the miniature by Isserlis that opened this recital. Russo makes clear how unjust that situation is. By far the greatest musical injustice, however, is that the Dutch public has missed Sandro Russo 'live', as a result of our national concert organizer's inexplicable neglect.

Elger Niels

Pianowereld (June/July issue)

primo interprete della Sonata, Kostantin Igumnov) del tutto analogo a quello che caratterizza la Sonata di Liszt. Le note di accompagnamento al cd non indicano - cosa direi abbastanza grave - quale delle due versioni della Sonata op. 36 venga scelta da Romanovsky. Si tratta della seconda, del 1931, che è molto più compatta di quella del 1913 e che si avvicina a sua volta al terzo rimaneggiamento effettuato da Horowitz (questa "terza edizione" del 1940 è stata pure oggetto di recente incisione da parte dei soliti giovani virtuosi ... dello scimmiettamento). L'estensore del libretto si arrampica su argomentazioni a parer mio fuori tema, suggerendo una strana parentela tra le due o tre versioni dell'opera 36 e la settima sonata di Prokofiev e insistendo anche su presunte atmosfere faustiane della seconda sonata, tanto da giustificare l'impaginazione del cd con il titolo "Russian Faust" e un paio di foto di Romanovsky tale da sembrare uscito fuori da una tela di Friedrich.

LUCA CHIERICI

**EXPLORING TIME WITH MY PIANO**

PIANOFORTE Sergei Kasprov  
CD Alpha 606  
PREZZO € 18  
★★★★



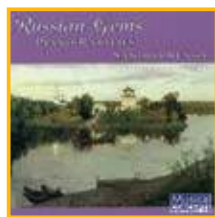
Molto interessante il cammino verso l'antico "attualizzato" che compie il pianista russo Sergei Kasprov, riesumando le "trascrizioni" di Rameau, Loeillet, Scarlatti e Bach fatte da Leopold Godowsky, Carl Tausig e Sergej Rachmaninov: a parte l'intento "pacificatore" dell'ormai oziosa querelle su clavicembalo (o pianoforte) sì o no, i brani sono specchio di un gusto forse più "antico" di quello degli autori presi come spunto, giacché se Rameau, Scarlatti e Bach rappresen-

tano le sommità del pensiero musicale occidentale della loro epoca (avendo fatto del passato la matrice del presente storico), Godowsky, Tausig e Rachmaninov sono invece degli eleganti conservatori (che nel passato hanno visto un loro "bene rifugio"), il cui concetto di barocco è un misto di "antiquariato" e idiosincrasie stilistiche forse ancor più complesso da rendere di quanto non lo sia il Settecento "autentico". Difficile anche affermare con certezza se Kasprov sia riuscito nell'intento oppure no giacché la sua sostanziale uniformità dinamica, che tenderebbe a fare il verso del clavicembalo, talvolta risulta monocolore.

CARLO FIORE

**RUSSIAN GEMS**

PIANOFORTE Sandro Russo  
CD Musical Concepts MC150  
PREZZO € d.d.  
★★★★



Il pianista siciliano Sandro Russo - residente a New York da una quindicina d'anni - è alla sua seconda fatica discografica assecondata dalla casa editrice americana "Musical Concepts" e si sposta da un primo terreno scarlattiano a uno dedicato a rarità pianistiche della musica russa. Qui le rarità ci sono davvero e Russo dimostra tra le altre cose di essere un intelligente topo di biblioteca interessato a riportare alla luce spartiti che altrimenti giacerebbero inutilizzati negli scaffali. Il programma è tutto da descrivere anche perché fa riferimento addirittura ad autori sconosciuti ai più. Julius Isserlis (1888-1968), che tra parentesi è il nonno del famoso violoncellista Steven, scrive una interessante *Skazka* affiancandosi ai più noti lavori di questo tipo messi a punto da Medtner (il quale ultimo viene qui ricordato attraverso la sua prima Sonata op. 5). Nikolai Rakov (1908-1990), fedele al regime e nominato "Artista del popolo" compare nel cd attraverso una "Canzone russa" trascritta magistralmente da Grigori Ginzburg,

autore anche della versione da concerto di un Valzer tratto dall'opera *Casanova* di Ludomir Rozycki (1883-1953). E ancora troviamo Sergej Taneyev con un austero e tecnicamente difficile Preludio e Fuga op. 29, e Rachmaninov con la ben nota Suite per due pianoforti op. 17 ma... trascritta per pianoforte solo da Vladimir Leyetchkiss appena nel 2009 (Sandro Russo ne estrapola il *Waltz* e la *Romanze*). Non tutto il contenuto di questo cd rappresenta una novità assoluta dal punto di vista editoriale (l'opera omnia di Isserlis è stata ad esempio incisa per la Hyperion dal pianista Sam Haywood ed esce sul mercato praticamente in contemporanea con questo disco) ma si tratta qui pur sempre di una scelta antologica davvero interessante. Quasi a ricordarci le sue doti di virtuoso ispirato, Russo chiude il programma con una bella esecuzione della famosissima *Islamey* di Balakirev, risolta con un suolo davvero squisito e una straordinaria cura dei particolari.

LUCA CHIERICI

**CAETANI**  
BALLATA, 4 IMPROVVISI  
TOCCATA, SONATA OP. 3

PIANOFORTE Alessandra Ammara  
CD Brilliant 94909  
PREZZO € 6,80  
★★★★



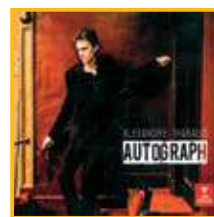
Roffredo Caetani (1871 - 1961) nacque da nobilissima famiglia italiana (era Duca di Sermoneta), studiò con Giovanni Sgambati e fu tenuto a battesimo nientemeno che da Franz Liszt. La nipote Topazia sposò il celebre direttore Igor Markevitch, e dalla coppia nacque quell'Oleg che oggi continua la carriera paterna avendo conservato il blasonato cognome della famiglia della madre. La figlia di Roffredo, principessa Lelia Caetani, scomparsa nel 1977, aveva a propria volta creato una fondazione rivolta a ricordare l'operato del pianista e più in generale a continuare un'opera di valorizzazione del territorio un tempo governato

dalla famiglia. Grazie all'influenza di Sgambati i superstiti lavori di Roffredo Caetani vennero pubblicati da Schott (il retrocopertina riporta il catalogo di lavori di Wagner e Liszt!) e sono oggi disponibili nei file della Petrucci Digital Library. La Ammara sceglie le pagine pianistiche che ci sono rimaste, ovvero i tre pezzi che compongono l'opera 9 (1899) e la Sonata op. 3 di sei anni precedente. Il commento al programma - ovviamente più che mai utile - è a firma di Roberto Prosseda e alle sue note rimando l'ascoltatore che sarà sicuramente incuriosito dai contenuti di questo disco. Si tratta di musiche chiaramente lontane dalle correnti innovative che scuotevano in quegli anni il mondo musicale, ma ciò non toglie che questa musica vada correttamente documentata e la Ammara compie questa operazione con gusto e convinzione. L'esiguo catalogo delle opere di Caetani comprende ancora un Quintetto con pianoforte, chiaro omaggio a Sgambati, che potrebbe essere fatto oggetto di recupero assieme a un Quartetto per archi e ad alcuni Intermezzi sinfonici.

LUCA CHIERICI

**AUTORI VARI**  
AUTOGRAPH

PIANOFORTE Alexandre Tharaud  
CD Erato 50999 934137 2 5  
PREZZO € 18,18  
★★★★



Il fascino del bis, nei suoi mille risvolti: prolungamento, per l'ascoltatore, dello stato di estasi creato dal recital, prima di rientrare nella vita di tutti i giorni, un'aspettativa covata col segreto interrogativo "cosa farà?" accompagnato talora dopo le prime note dall'inconfessabile disagio, "cos'è?". Un piccolo rito, insomma, ben diverso da quello celebrato nel teatro d'opera (e bandito rigorosamente da Toscanini) dove un brano viene replicato pronta cassa, nel corso della rappresentazione, non senza rischi, come avvenne a Parma nei tempi d'oro quan-



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# Piano WERELD

*Met speeltips van Wibi*



**INTERVIEW SANDRO RUSSO** / FÖRSTER PIANOFABRIEK IN LÖBAU (2) / OUDE MEESTERS:  
THEO BRUINS / BLADMUZIEKBIJLAGE: ETUDE GRIEG/JOOST VAN KERKHOVEN /  
OPENING BOL PIANO'S & VLEUGELS / INTERVIEW LIEBRECHT VAN BECKEVOORT



De Italiaanse pianist Sandro Russo zal in april zijn Nederlandse debuut maken in Cristofori tijdens de International Rachmaninoff Conference, waarvan hij het openingsconcert voor zijn rekening neemt. Op het programma staan, naast werken van Grieg en Taneyev, onder meer een complete uitvoering van de liederen opus 26 van 'Mr. C Sharp Minor'.

“De piano laten zingen als *Di Stefano* is mijn ideaal”

Pianist Sandro Russo maakt  
debuut op Rachmaninoff  
Conference



## TRANSLATION

The Italian pianist Sandro Russo will make his debut in the Netherlands in April, in the Cristofori Concert Hall at the Rachmaninoff International Conference, for the opening concert. The program includes, in addition to works by Grieg and Taneyev, a complete performance of the complete song cycle Opus 26, by “Mr. C sharp minor.”

“To make the piano sing like Di Stefano is my ideal.”

Pianist Sandro Russo makes his debut at the Rachmaninoff Conference.

*Piano Wereld Magazine* – March 2006

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## Spotlight on Sandro Russo



**“This piano had a real voice and I’ve never felt something as magical as playing this instrument.”**

**S**peaking with a soft-timbre in his voice, Sandro Russo sat down with NYRisingStar’s Arthur Sato to chat about his burgeoning piano career. Mr. Russo will be performing Beethoven’s Emperor Concerto with New York Asian Symphony Orchestra on a tour of Japan, this coming June.

**AS:** At what age did you come to NYC?

**SR:** Early twenties... I’ve been here now for nine years... I was about 22 when I came

**AS:** Did you come for graduate school or for musical pedagogy of some sort?

**SR:** Well, when I came to New York, I didn’t have a particular goal. I had in mind to continue my education with a private teacher or some of the fine institutions that New York has. I was more interested in sounding the ground and exploring the new environment.

**AS:** New York City has an internationally recognized musical community. As an outsider coming into such a music scene, could you shed a little light on your perspective of NYC, and how it might have changed through the years?

**SR:** Well, I think the difference lies in that fact that before

I came to NY, I only knew about all the great artists that moved here at some point in their lives. So, I had more of a vision of these artists that came here. I'm talking about Rachmaninoff... Horowitz. I heard about the great schools, you know, and all the great artists that they were able to produce. But that's a totally different thing than being here, and exploring...

**AS:** Where they actually were.

**SR:** Yes, and also, you really feel not only the people that have been here, but what the city projects as a whole in its musical aura and the environment, which is very interesting, and STILL very fascinating.

**AS:** And how would you compare it to other international arts communities around the world that you have experienced or continue to experience?

**SR:** I'm quite familiar with some major cities like London. I studied at the Royal College of Music in 1996. I don't know really, cause these days, the major cities are inhabited by the great artists of the world. And this is what makes these cities great. One of New York's strength is that it is an awesome city and has great history and majesty... Perhaps it overlaps with the music making in its grandness. But I still think it's the people in the cities than the cities themselves.

**AS:** Are you from a musical family?

**SR:** Oh? Well, I'm not from a musical family. Well, my parents are big supporters of classical music through what has happened to me. Although I don't come from a musical family in the sense of having pianists or professional musicians in my family, music has always been something cultivated to a great extent in my family if I consider my ancestors... many played at an amateur level, actually. My Grandmother played piano by ear, and my grandfather from my mother side played clarinet in a band, and my mom always desired to study piano. At that time, there were some problems studying piano in tiny Sicily, logistical difficulties. This desire was passed to my older brother and then to me.

**AS:** Ah, you have an older brother that plays piano as well!

**SR:** Yes. An older brother that is responsible for me to start playing. When I was four, he was nine and

started taking piano lessons and so I followed in his footsteps

**AS:** Yes, I know what that's like. I'm a musician, and have an older sister that plays violin. It was the natural thing to do.. When did you start taking privately?

**SR:** Well, it's interesting. When I was four I was able to start playing without instruction. I was actually able to play all the pieces that my brother played, but I didn't have a teacher.

**AS:** You played it by ear.

**SR:** Yes, although—this is what my parents tell me., always—although I played by ear, they tell me I would follow the score and I was able to turn pages. I don't remember this. Apparently, I had my own way to read the score....

**AS:** And you weren't aware of it?

**SR:** Absolutely not.

**AS:** That's great

**SR:** I remember when I woke up, my wish, my first, was to go to the piano and play. But in terms of instruction, I had very poor instruction as a young pianist, because, again, we didn't have great instruction available in the town that I grew up. At the age of six I was studying with a young pianist that was a conservatory student and had no experience in teaching Then later at the age of 8, my parents were able to send me to a teacher that was able to at least inspire me with stuff like four hand pieces. Still, I was getting ordinary instruction until I was in my mid teens. That was when I was working with concert pianists that gave master-classes all over Italy and taught at different schools.

**AS:** Ah, ok, so you eased into things.

**SR:** Yes, I would say it was a little peculiar. Especially now when I consider kids coming at 8 or 10 years old to schools.

**AS:** Like pre-college programs of schools like Juilliard.

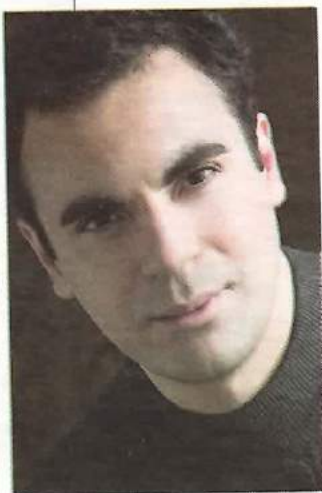
**SR:** Yes. So, I didn't discover much about the great art of piano playing until I was in my mid-teens. Thanks to a Russian pianist at the Moscow conservatory who I studied with regularly and in master-classes once a month... Boris Petrushansky... he was one of the last students of Heinrich Neuhaus, and later Lev Naumov, who was also a great musician who taught

## Spotlight on Sandro Russo

great students.

**AS:** Petrushansky was your mentor?

**SR:** Definitely, definitely. As a pianist, I see myself from the Russian school rather than Italian., for whatever that means. Because he was really my big influence and he was a musician who was really able to convey the best essence of the Russian school. A school of poetry, and music of the highest level SO that poetry really clicked really well with my musicality.



**"I realized that at some point this piano had a real voice, a soul."**

—Sandro Russo

**AS:** As a musician I really understand its not what you learn at the keyboard, but it's your attitude and your musical approach... after awhile, it permeates everything and becomes a guide to your life.

**SR:** Well, at first our temperaments werent on the same page. He inspired me in a way that my temperament would be come more versatile... that my vocabulary and feelings in music would become as wide as possible. I was really drawn to his art

**AS:** The more you're drawn to it, the better you get at it, the more you want to learn.

**SR:** Yes, and then later you are able to depart from it.

**AS:** I agree. Change of gear—I read about your interest in more obscure composers and your commitment to them. How did you realize this interest?

**SR:** Yes, well... None of my teachers inspired me in doing this. (We both share a laugh) I've always been passionate about reading music, spending time in libraries studying scores. I've also been fascinated with how (a piece of) music looks before I play it... I've always wanted to explore as much music as possible. As a pianist, I feel, as part of my mission, a very strong responsibility, you know, to bring to

the light the music of unknown composers who, for some reason, did not have the luck of some of the others. You know, it happens nowadays, it happened centuries ago. Great pieces that for some reason didn't get the recognition that they should have had. And let's remember the artists that whatever they played, like Horowitz, the next day people would go to the store and get the sheet music. These great names who played those works and were able to make the works so famous. There are many works that didn't have the superstar musician to get famous, but, still, they are wonderful in quality. There are unknown composers that make great things, and there are well known composers who sometimes, well, make not-so-great things.

**AS:** (Chuckling) I'd have to agree with the former and the latter.

**SR:** Again, redeeming these works from an already oblivious situation in which they are never played or never known, I am also very interested in the contemporary music of composers. Especially those who are pianists, because they really know how to write for the instrument. Also, because I feel like I am part of the same living tradition, which is very special to me. To play a work of an artist out of respect, I really feel part of a world.

**AS:** Understandable. Definitely one of the best parts of being a classical musician, or performing artist. Taking part in the lineage and history and tradition of the art and its practice. I like that phrase "Living tradition".

**SR:** most of the time I feel the composer-pianist is able to continue more of that great tradition of history with Schumann, Chopin, Liszt... all the great composer pianists. I also wonder if this interest in composers was born out of the boredom of playing the standard programs.... When I was still in the conservatory in Italy. One could arrive at their final year in training without having touched a Prokofiev Sonata or a Scriabin Sonata. So, It's a bit curiosity and interest, and a strong element of my mission as a musician.

**AS:** In the later spring, this year, you are going with NYASO to Japan to perform Beethoven's Emperor

Concerto with the orchestra. This past October, the great pianist and board member of NYASO Walter Hautzig, performed this concerto with NYASO to great approval. Can you shed any light on how it feels to have opportunity to perform this piece with the same orchestra, following Maestro Hautzig?

**SR:** Well, certainly, it's a great honor, first of all, cause I was at the performance, and I was very much inspired by his art of playing.... Particularly, I felt something that was of the old school an that was what I was really drawn to. He was able to projoect such great poetry, which is not always the case when you hear it. So, absolutely It is really a great honor when Maestro Yamada asked me to perform it on the tour. Each one of us has his idea of the piece, but it's very nice to think of that performance as an inspiring moment.

**AS:** Have you had a chance to concertize in Asia yet?

**SR:** Not yet, actually, so this will be my debut.

**AS:** Recently, you worked on a DVD project. Could you expound a little upon that?

**SR:** Yes, this was actually, really, a great surprise for me. I'm actually a big fan of Bechstein pianos. So, I expressed my enthusiasm to do a concert to the general manager of the location in New York,. He noticed right away the special connection I have with these instruments and he invited me to take part in a gala to celebrate a historical instrument from 1862 that belonged to franz liszt. The piano was on a tour through the States.

**AS:** And this was your opportunity to play such a historical instrument!

**SR:** Yes, at first they asked me to play something gentle, but I realized that at some point this piano had a real voice, a soul. So, we came up to an idea to do a recording of some kind of repertoire of this instrument. Of course, it would have to be repertoire that would help come out the lyrical part of this instrument. So, I came out with a program of about an hour that included Liszt...Schubert-Liszt Ave Marie....and some other works related to Liszt... some very difficult repertoire for this instrument. So, I

set out on recording these works on this instrument, and it was such a great experience... as I had said before, this piano had a real voice and I've never felt something as magical as playing this instrument. This instrument was able to draw me into a world of sound I have never been in before... So, something very inspiringThe DVD should be out soon.

**AS:** So, this is a very rare opportunity for people, especially the aficionados of historical pianos...

**SR:** and Liszt!

**AS:** ...and Liszt to witness.... And this was video recorded, where?

**SR:** At the Bechstein Piano Center on 58th St.

**AS:** And when can we expect this to come out?

**SR:** Hopefully, in the next couple of months, you will be able to get a copy of the DVD, either directly through my website, or through Bechstein, or hopefulliy even Amazon.

**AS:** What a wonderful project.

## Concert Schedule

### June 2009

Tour in Japan with NYASO, performing Beethoven's 5th Piano Concerto (Emperor)

### 08-12-2009 at 12:15 pm

Solo recital at Dame Myra Hess Memorial Concerts- Preston Bradley Hall of the Chicago Culture Center

### 08-24-2009 at 7:00 pm

Solo recital at the Chetham's International Festival in Manchester, UK-LongMillgate, Manchester, M3 1SB

URLs:

[www.sandrorussopianist.com](http://www.sandrorussopianist.com)

[www.myspace.com/pianistsandrorusso](http://www.myspace.com/pianistsandrorusso)

Youtube:

[www.youtube.com/results?serch\\_query=sandro+russo](http://www.youtube.com/results?serch_query=sandro+russo)

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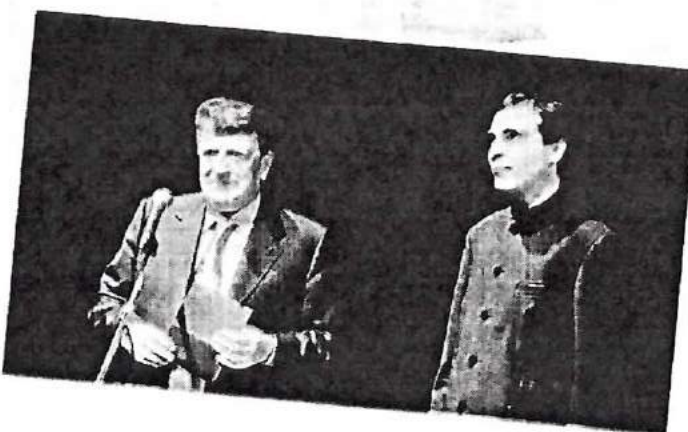
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## La Sala dei Notari incornicia le armoniose note del pianista Sandro Russo

PERUGIA - Una Sala dei Notari più bella che mai ha fatto da perfetta cornice alle note "essenziali" e "pure" del pianista Sandro Russo. Un evento unico, voluto e organizzato dalla Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Perugia che, a nome del suo presidente Carlo Colaiacovo, ha voluto omaggiare la città presentando la sublime performance del celebre musicista che per l'occasione ha eseguito musiche di Beethoven,

Chopin, Debussy, Scriabin, Rachmaninoff e Balakirev, dimostrando ancora una volta la sua straordinaria capacità nell'esplorare pagine del repertorio pianistico più insolite e fors'anche più difficili.

Ospite regolare di importanti istituzioni concertistiche asiatiche ed europee, a Sandro Russo sono stati conferiti vari riconoscimenti artistici anche da parte del Consiglio per le Arti dello Stato di



Il presidente Carlo Colaiacovo  
 insieme al pianista  
 Sandro Russo

New York, soprattutto per le brillanti affermazioni riportate negli Stati Uniti, terra in cui risiede da tempo. E anche l'altra sera le

emozioni non sono mancate. In questo suo spaziare (a memoria) fra Beethoven e Rachmaninoff, in tutte quelle atmosfere intrecciate,

si poteva cogliere infine un'unica, tangibile, straordinaria modernità. Trame intessute da richiami onomatopeici e da ritmi ossessivi, che via via hanno rivelato un gusto particolare per la reiterazione, per il ritorno a quelle cellule tematiche che piacciono tanto soprattutto a Rachmaninoff. Atmosfere livide, a volte un po' desolate, che tuttavia sono solo un "tocco", un assaggio, dell'infinito universo espressivo di questo grande esecutore che l'America ha ormai fatto suo.

**FRANCESCO CASTELLINI**

## TRANSLATION REVIEW

### **The Sala dei Notari is backdrop for harmonious notes of Sandro Russo**

PERUGIA - A more beautiful than ever Sala dei Notari was the perfect frame for the "essential" and "pure" notes of pianist Sandro Russo. The concert, a unique event, conceived by the president of the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Perugia, Carlo Colaiacovo, and organized by that organization, paid homage to the city by presenting this sublime performance by the renowned pianist. To mark the occasion, Mr. Russo performed works by Beethoven, Chopin, Debussy, Scriabin, Rachmaninoff and Balakirev, confirming once again his extraordinary ability to explore the more obscure works of the piano literature, and perhaps the more challenging ones as well.

A regular guest artist in Asian and European concert series, Mr. Russo has received various accolades, including those from the New York Council on the Arts, for his brilliant successes in the United States, where he has resided for several years. And the other evening didn't lack emotions either. In his musical wanderings from Beethoven to Rachmaninoff, one ultimately could perceive through all those ever-changing musical moods, a unique, tangible modernism. Interwoven threads of onomatopoeic references and obsessive rhythms increasingly revealed musical tendencies for reiteration, i.e., the repetition of certain thematic cells that are very much loved, especially in the case of Rachmaninoff. Raging atmospheres, at times desolate, are only a "touch," a taste of the infinite, expressive universe of this great interpreter that America by now has made its own.

Francesco Castellini, Giornale dell'Umbria, May 10, 2013.



# Broad Street Review

Thursday, June 27, 2013

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Sandro Russo's Lisztomania

BY: [Maria Thompson Corley](#) 04.21.2009



Russo: Chance of a lifetime.

The pianist Sandro Russo has no agent, but his obsession with the music of Franz Liszt has opened global opportunities for him. His latest coup: a DVD recorded on Liszt's own 1862 Bechstein piano. (With a video excerpt of [Russo playing Liszt's Bechstein.](#))

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## Franz Liszt is his agent

MARIA THOMPSON CORLEY

To say that the pianist Sandro Russo loves the music of Franz Liszt is a profound understatement. "I can't live without him," he told me, explaining that he admires the way this 19th-Century Hungarian pianist and composer culled inspiration from anything— religion, paintings, literature, any and all emotion, just to name a few examples.

Russo calls Liszt "my musical master," a type of reverence that's usually reserved, at least in North American musical circles, for Bach, Brahms and Beethoven. Then again, if every pianist had Sandro Russo's technique, he or she might play more of Liszt's piano music, which might, in turn, lead to more such disciples of his output.

It isn't just Liszt's bravura pieces that Russo adores, however. One of several reasons he became the very first actual friend I met on Myspace was our shared love of playing very, very softly, when the occasion warrants, in keeping with our mutual interest in creating a widely varied tonal palette. This part of Russo's playing and Liszt's art are explored in his recent DVD, "Sandro Russo Plays the 1862 Bechstein Liszt Piano" (Available in late May at [www.sandrorussopianist.com](http://www.sandrorussopianist.com).)

A string of honors

Russo was born in San Giovanni Gemini, Sicily, graduated summa cum laude from the Vincenzo Bellini Conservatory and received the Pianoforte Performing Diploma "with honors" from the Royal College of Music in London, picking up numerous prizes in national and international competitions along the way. He came to New York in 2000 and won the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra Competition soon afterward. Since then, he has given concerts in Carnegie Hall (in Weill Recital Hall and Zankel Hall) in addition to appearing in other venues, nationally and internationally.

He has performed with the Brussels Chamber Orchestra under Michael Guttman, the Sinfonica Siciliana with Tomasz Bugaj, the Slovak

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Sutman, the Simona Simana with Tomasz Bagaj, the Slovak Philharmonic conducted by Tomas Hanus, and the Jacksonville Symphony under Fabio Mechetti. Russo has also performed in such world-famous halls as the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and the Salle Cortot in Paris and premiered compositions by Lowell Liebermann, Paul Moravec, and Marc-Andre Hamelin. This year he will perform in San Francisco, Chicago and Manchester, U.K. as well as touring Japan with the New York Asian Symphony Orchestra.

Not bad for a pianist who has no agent.

Serendipity with a Bechstein

Since Russo represents himself, he often must create his own opportunities. One such endeavor led to his life-altering encounter with Liszt's piano. In the fall of 2008, Russo approached John Skidmore, general manager of the New York Bechstein Piano Centre, about the possibility of performing on one of the fabulous pianos in the showroom. (To Americans, Steinway is the name associated with great pianos, but to many pianists— including me— playing a Bechstein is a particularly glorious experience. The nine-foot grand I was lucky enough to play seemed to read my mind, allowing me to produce effortlessly every nuance imaginable.)

When Russo called, as it happens, the Bechstein store was planning a joint recital to celebrate the arrival from Germany of Liszt's 1862 Bechstein, and Skidmore invited Russo to participate in this event. That performance led to an invitation to give a solo recital at the Bechstein Centre, with the opportunity to play an encore on the historic 1862 piano. Sandro's first performance on Liszt's instrument was of the composer's Consolation in D Flat Major, an experience Sandro described as "thrilling" and "history come to life."

Chance of a lifetime

That encore led to the chance of a lifetime: the opportunity to immortalize the historic piano's first tour of the U.S. by recording a DVD. Apparently, the Liszt piano had never been recorded or even used for a public performance after Liszt's death, so such unprecedented access was special indeed.

But first a few issues needed to be resolved. The piano was 147 years old, and although it was in excellent condition otherwise, the damper pedal had begun to squeak. Far more problematic was the fact that the Liszt Bechstein was due back in Germany in two weeks, so all the arrangements had to be made right away, including the preparation of repertoire. And even though Liszt's robust pianism had helped end the era of the wooden-framed piano (cast iron was needed to withstand his virtuosity), his Bechstein was a museum piece. So Skidmore told Sandro that pyrotechnical displays were off-limits.

In the end, Sandro chose to play the first three of Liszt's Consolations, the Schubert-Liszt Ave Maria, and two pieces "in the spirit" of Liszt: the Myra Hess arrangement of Bach's Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring and a transcription of Gluck's Dance of the Blessed Spirits from Orpheus.

To live in another world

How does it feel to play the piano that once belonged to your idol? Sandro spoke of "a profoundly stirring connection with the essential being and very soul of Liszt as I performed his work, touching the actual keys and pedals of the instrument Liszt had once played." The tone of the instrument is impossible to convey in words, so I've included a link to [Sandro Russo's performance of the Consolation in D Flat Major](#).

Although he was forced to acclimate to the piano's unfamiliar timbre and change his pedaling to accommodate the deterioration of the pedal's mechanical parts, Sandro said he felt "no limitations—only inspiration."

After spending several hours recording on the 1862 Bechstein, Sandro said, he turned on his car radio and found the sonority of the modern piano jarring. "For a moment," he said, "I really believed I could live in another world, thanks to that piano."

◆

**Recital**  
**RARE BAROQUE GEMS IN CREATIVE ARTS SERIES CONCERT**  
 by Joanna Bramel Young  
 Sunday, June 02, 2013



A small but appreciative June 2 audience heard in Santa Rosa's Resurrection Parish a delightful buffet of baroque vocal and instrumental works performed by the five-year old Vinaccesi Ensemble of Berkeley. Nanette McGuinness soprano; Kindra Scharich, mezzo soprano; Jonathan Smucker, tenor; and ba...

**Opera**  
**POWERFUL OPENING NIGHT FOR CINNABAR'S CARMEN**  
 by Vaida Falconbridge  
 Saturday, June 01, 2013



When "Carmen" debuted at the Opera Comique in 1875, it was poorly received. Its composer, Georges Bizet, died a few months later, thinking he had written another failure. Now widely considered the most popular opera in the world, "Carmen" was excellently performed and given an enthusiastic reception...

**Symphony**  
**FIVE FINGERS WITH THE STRENGTH OF TEN**  
 by Steve Osborn  
 Thursday, May 23, 2013



"My name is David, and I'm going to be your conductor for this evening." With that corny but amusing opening line, guest conductor David Robertson

introduced himself and the San Francisco Symphony to a less than full house at the Green Music Center on May 23. It was hard to understand why the place ...

**Symphony**  
**UKIAH SYMPHONY CLOSSES SEASON WITH TWO BIG WORKS**  
 by Ed Reinhart  
 Sunday, May 19, 2013



The Ukiah Symphony closed its 2012-13 season May 19th with a bold matinee presentation at the Mendocino College Theater. Featured were

the Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 in B Flat minor, Opus 23, and the third and fourth Movements of Beethoven's 9th Symphony, Opus 125. Pianist Lawrence Holmfjo...

**Symphony**  
**A PERFECT 10 FOR THE TENTH**  
 by Steve Osborn  
 Saturday, May 11, 2013



The Santa Rosa Symphony capped off its first year in the resplendent Green Music Center with an impassioned performance of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony, widely

**RECITAL REVIEW**  
**Concerts Grand / Sunday, April 18, 2010**  
 Sandro Russo, Pianist



Sandro Russo after playing

## RUSSO SCORCHES NEWMAN AUDITORIUM IN SEASON FINALE RECITAL

by Terry McNeill  
Sunday, April 18, 2010

Spring thunder from sunny Italy was the order of the day April 18 when Sicilian pianist Sandro Russo closed the seventh Concerts Grand season with a dramatic recital at Santa Rosa Junior College.

In an 80-minute program before a Newman Auditorium audience of 120 Mr. Russo disdained the usual opening works of Scarlatti and Mozart and launched into a powerful rendering of Liszt's magnificent "Variations on Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Sagen," based on a Bach Cantata first heard in April, 1714. The title can be translated as "Weeping, Lamenting, Worry and Apprehension" and Mr. Russo's imposing interpretation brought out the works majesty as well as its infinite sorrow. His running left-hand octave playing was masterly and the often judicious tempos let air into the work. There was reconciliation in the chorale where grief is overcome.

If the Liszt might could be about conquering adversity, Beethoven's F Minor Sonata ("Appassionata") is surely about it. With memorable past Newman performances by Joseph Banowetz and the mercurial Valentina Lisitsa, Mr. Russo had a mountain to climb in a sonata the composer was said to have liked above all others. The difficult articulation problems in the opening Allegro assai were handled with ease and Mr. Russo had the requisite speed and large tone in the second subject. The short set of variations comprising the second movement were lovingly set out, the artist in no hurry to get anywhere.

Recently pianists (e. g., Schiff, Fellner, Biss) have been playing the Sonata and especially the concluding Allegro ma non troppo is an "architectural" style, emphasizing structure and inner thematic relationships over passion. Mr. Russo would have none of this, seizing the emotional drive and sweep of the movement and bringing the audience to its feet with the final fortissimo chords. The piano would have been hot to the touch as he left the stage amid cheers.

Following intermission Lowell Liebermann's haunting Nocturne No. 8 (2004) was given, and Mr. Russo knows these pieces (there are now 11 Nocturnes) through careful study and his own premiere of the Nocturne No. 10. The eighth is haunting, the menacing quality set against short lyrical passages. Mr.



regarded as his masterpiece in the genre. Every section of the orchestra, from the lowest bass to the most stratospheric piccolo, played to...

Symphony  
**PRAYERS AND REDEMPTION FROM THE APSC**

by Nicki Bell  
Saturday, May 04, 2013



For its final set of the 2012-13 season on May 4 and 5, the American Philharmonic of Sonoma County offered a program titled "Prayer and Redemption." The first half consisted of the prayers, the second of the joy of redemption. Guest conductor Cyrus

Ginwala spoke about the pieces beforehand and then ...

Symphony  
**FULL CIRCLE FOR KAHANE**

by Steve Osborn  
Saturday, April 27, 2013



Since the conclusion of his decade-long tenure with the Santa Rosa Symphony in 2006, conductor laureate Jeffrey Kahane has traveled widely, but he has often circled back to Sonoma County as a

piano soloist. On Saturday evening, April 27, he upped the ante by not only bringing his prodigious keyboard...

Recital  
**MESMERIZING IRISH MEZZO TELLS STORIES IN WEILL SONG RECITAL**

by Vaida Falconbridge  
Sunday, April 21, 2013



There were stories of fiery gypsies, dances, kisses, deep angst, unrequited love, mermaids, and headstrong young maidens. Irish-born mezzo soprano Tara Erraught told her Weill Hall audience April 21 in her lilting Irish brogue, "People ask why I pick the programs the way I do. Well, being from

Irel...

Recital  
**SONG CYCLES FOR CONNOISSEURS**

by Terry McNeill  
Tuesday, April 09, 2013



Elina Garanca's April 9 Weill Hall recital was a connoisseur's program, eschewing the more popular song literature and concentrating on mostly subtle and evocative works of Schumann, Berg and Richard Strauss. With

pianist Kevin Murphy, the Latvian mezzo soprano, famous from the opera stage as a sum...

Recital  
**VADIM REPIN: STARLIGHT, SHINING BRIGHT**

by Steve Osborn  
Sunday, April 07, 2013



Born in Siberia in 1971, violinist Vadim Repin is as Russian as they come, but he played nary a note of Russian music in his April 7 recital at the Green Music Center's Weill Hall. The closest he got was the

last movement of the Janacek violin sonata, which celebrates the triumphal entry of

Russo's interpretation has changed since I heard him play it in 2004, now less explosive in the big crashes of sound in measures 123 and 124, emphasizing more the mysterious nature of the writing. Is anyone writing nocturne-like works with such sonic interest as Mr. Liebermann?

The formal program concluded with Schumann's eight-movement Kreisleriana, Op. 16. It is a difficult work to hold together, with many da capo forms of various moods. Mr. Russo approached each with care, especially in the Sehr langsam where his tonal control was exquisite. The entire performance exhibited a controlled rotation and double-note legato technique, glowing cantilena in the Sehr aufgereggt with the final conception lacking perhaps only the last portion of introspection.

The ending of the Schumann caused some confusion in the hall as the program, printed eight months ago, showed it as the last work. People were preparing to leave but fortunately Mr. Russo was in a generous mood and capped the recital and season in a driving and ultimately sensational performance of Balakirev's Oriental Fantasy "Islamey." Considered one of the most difficult works in the standard piano repertoire, Mr. Russo's whirlwind of repeated notes, large right-hand skips and a dollop on bombast were equal to the score's demands. Those in the first row were a little scorched by what one listener called a "Vesuvius" of sound, but that's what you get with a great "Islamey" performance. There was no encore offered or needed.

Sandro Russo's recital was on balance the most virtuosic playing heard in Santa Rosa since the Bronfman, Ohlsson and Nakamatsu concerts of three years ago and was a forceful capstone to the nine-recital Concerts Grand season.

The reviewer is the producer of the Concerts Grand series.

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# American Liszt Society

AN OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN LISZT SOCIETY, INC.

## 2008 ALS Conference Will Take Place in Washington, DC

by Thomas Mastroianni

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It is my privilege to invite you to attend the 2008 annual conference of the American Liszt Society in the beautiful city of Washington, DC. We have scheduled activities for Friday, May 30 through the evening of Sunday, June 1. It is my pleasure to co-host this year's conference with members of the Baltimore-Washington Chapter of the Society.

This year's theme is "Liszt, Literature, and Painting." We have secured the facilities of the Catholic University of America (CUA), National Gallery of Art, and Library of Congress to provide a variety of beautiful and functional venues to support an exciting three days of events!

After brief introductory remarks by Susan Vita (Director of the Music Division, Library of Congress), Murry Sidlin (Dean of the CUA Rome School of Music), and me at 9:15am on Friday morning, the opening presentation will feature Frank Cooper speaking on the subject, "Liszt and Literature." The first concert of the conference will follow at 10:30am with ALS competition winners performing selections from the *Années de Pèlerinage II* ("Italie"): Bobby Mitchell offers *Sposalizio*, Irene Kim the *Sonetti del Petrarca* Nos. 47 and 104, and Michael Schneider the "Dante" Sonata.

We segue into yet another recital, this one featuring repertoire centered on the

Poets." Soprano Sharon Christman and pianist Ivo Kaltchev will perform three Liszt songs based on texts by Heine and Goethe, followed by pianists Matthew Bengston and Gila Goldstein performing transcriptions by Liszt of songs of Schumann and Schubert. Dominic Traino, Brian Chou, and Claudia Bornholdt will also perform.

Following lunch, Rena Charnin Mueller, Editor of the *Journal of the American Liszt Society*, will speak on the subject, "Liszt: French Literature and Thought," focusing on the authors Lamartine, Lamennais, and others. Keeping with the pattern of interspersing spoken presentations with recitals, we will move to a program featuring the *Harmonies Poétiques et Religieuses* performed by Sean Duggan, James Litzelman, Jay Hershberger, and Paul Barnes, our talented host for the 2005 ALS Conference in Lincoln.

At 4:00pm, the always-popular scholar Alan Walker speaks on "Liszt as Author." Liszt's essays and other written works have great importance to the performer and scholar in understanding his thinking, emotions, and motivation, and this is a session not to be missed.

The afternoon concludes with a special event: presentation of the ALS Medal of Excellence to Maestro James Conlon. While Conlon himself is unable to be with

## More News of Members, Chapters, and Friends

### New York/New Jersey Chapter (Gila Goldstein, Founder-President, and David Witten, Vice-President)

Pianist Sandro Russo ([www.sandrorussopianist.com](http://www.sandrorussopianist.com)) performed for the ALS New York/New Jersey Chapter on November 15 at the Yamaha Piano Salon. Sandro was first introduced to the ALS community at the San Francisco ALS Festival in March 2007, where he stunned everyone with his unique and ultra-virtuosic playing. His New York performance, which presented both well-known and lesser-known works, was just as incredible. The program included Mendelssohn's *Variations Sérieuses*; Chopin's *Andante Spianato and Grand Polonaise*; Poulenc's *Improvisation*; the Saint-Saëns/Liszt/Horowitz *Danse Macabre*; Scriabin's *Fantasy in B minor*; Liebermann's *Nocturne No. 5*; and Liszt's *Spanish Rhapsody*. For an encore he played the *Étude for the Left-Hand* by Felix Blumenfeld. The entire recital is now available on YouTube! - search Sandro Russo American Liszt Society.

The next event sponsored by the New York/New Jersey Chapter is scheduled for 8:00pm on Wednesday, March 26 at the John J. Cali School of Music, Montclair State University, 1 Normal Avenue, Montclair, NJ. The pianist will be Koji Attwood performing a solo recital. Admission is free. For more information contact David at [Wittend@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:Wittend@mail.montclair.edu) or Gila at [gilagoldstein@aol.com](mailto:gilagoldstein@aol.com) or by phone at 973-655-4379.

Gila recently notified the *Newsletter* of a great book about the pianist Ervin Nyiregyházi: *Lost Genius: The curious and tragic story of a musical prodigy* by Kevin Bazzana. The book is published by Carroll & Graf, ISBN 978-0-78672-088-0. Go to the Carroll & Graf website at [www.eruditor.com/exec/books/item/9780786720880.html](http://www.eruditor.com/exec/books/item/9780786720880.html), or go to [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)

Nancy Roldán reports that in May, 2007 she took her "... final step and retired from teaching at the Peabody Conservatory of Music." She still is, however, performing and presenting master classes. In addition to piano-duo performances during 2007, she performed with violinist José Cueto at the Great Romantics Festival in Hamilton, Ontario. On April 12 there will be a special recital-performance in a fund raiser for the Liszt/Garrison Festival and Competition at the College of Notre Dame in Maryland, where Nancy will perform one of her favorite latest discoveries - "TANGO!" - in the distinguished company of Bandoneon virtuoso David Alsina, violinist José Cueto, vocalist/actor and Emmy Award nominee Gabriella Cavallero, violinist José Cueto, and other greats.

She will be presenting two master classes, one on wellness and technique, and the other on performance, plus a violin-piano duo recital at the University of Colorado at Boulder. The same recital will be a fund raiser to benefit Modern Muse Theatre Company in Denver at the King Center of the University of Colorado. She is on the program of the ALS Conference in Washington and will undertake a mini-tour with the theme "Tone Paintings" that will include several venues in Maryland.

Thomas Allen (14), private student of **Falko Steinbach**, won the Grand Prize of the New Mexico Symphony Concerto Competition 2007. Lauren Anderson, also a student of **Falko Steinbach**, was a Winner of the Creative Presentations Category in the University of New Mexico Undergraduate Research and Creativity Conference. Her subject was the order of the piano keyboard.

Glenn Kurtz's *Practicing: A Musician's Return to Music* has been nominated for the Quality Paperback Book Club's "New Voices" award. The winner will be announced in May 2008. *Practicing* also received a nice notice in *The New York Times* Sunday Book Review on October 28, an issue devoted to music. Readers may visit the NYT link [www.nytimes.com/2007/10/28/books/review/Itzkoff3-t.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/28/books/review/Itzkoff3-t.html) to see the complete article. You can hear Glenn's interview on Wisconsin Public Radio's nationally-broadcast "To The Best of Our Knowledge" by going to [www.wpr.org/book/071007a.html](http://www.wpr.org/book/071007a.html). An even earlier interview with Scott Simon on NPR's "Weekend Edition" is still online at [www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12843867](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12843867).

*[If you have a news item about your professional activities, please send information to Edward Rath, Editor of the ALS Newsletter, at [erath@uiuc.edu](mailto:erath@uiuc.edu). Be sure to specify ALS News in the subject line.]*

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# RACHMANINOFF SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



### Sunday at Goldsmiths College A Master of Distinction

Elena Caldine and Ivan Hovorun are two promising young pianists who have both been finalists and indeed prizewinners at various international piano competitions. Both also toured in Europe and Russia with solo recitals and performances with orchestras. For this occasion they prepared the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, they performed on the rich sounding Blüthner concert grand, with Bryan Cresswell making an impressive job of the orchestral part, playing on the Yamaha.

Under the watchful eye and ear of Howard Shelley, Elena Caldine started off with an intense and powerful reading which was certainly impressive from a technical point of view but which somehow fell short of telling us what it was all about. It took a while before it dawned upon her that this impressive display of pianism might actually be standing in the way of bringing across the musical message of the *Rhapsody*. It was fascinating to see how Mr. Shelley was able to change her basic approach to the work by way of some well-aimed remarks!

The other young pianist of the morning, Ivan Hovorun, managed to show us more of both the diabolical and dramatic qualities of the *Rhapsody* and his genuine understanding of the work allowed him to re-



spond well to the subtle but distinct advice from Mr. Shelley. As a result we witnessed some magical moments, revealing the innermost qualities of both pianist and the work at hand. Mr. Shelley's explanation of the strong programmatic content of the *Rhapsody*, based on Paganini's dealings with the devil, his love for a woman, his dealings with the church and his final defeat, was an eye-opener to all present.

In an effort to show Ivan Hovorun what he wanted to hear, Mr. Shelley took over. I am sure all can vouch for me here, when I say that in his playing of the transition from variation 17 to 18, the sheer magic of the moment deeply touched our hearts. A true 'master' indeed!

#### Songs and Variations

With Howard Shelley providing the ideal accompaniment, the young American soprano Olivia McLean surprised us with a very sensitive reading of three songs from both Op. 8 (Nos. 4 & 6) and Op. 14 No.1.

This was followed by an exceptional performance of the *Corelli Variations* by the Italian pianist Sandro Russo. Mr. Russo has won top prizes in numerous international competitions and, in this performance, it was clear to all of us how this came about: a complete understanding of this remarkable Op. 42 and a near flawless technique to match.

#### The final *Dies Irae*

To close off the public part of the Confer-

ence, Elger Niels took us to the inner sanctity of so many of Rachmaninoff's works: the *Dies Irae*. He provided us with a chance to follow this ancient chant through works like the *Rhapsody* and the *Symphonic Dances* and – lo and behold - to the final notes of the *Corelli Variations*! We listened with bated breath to his fascinating account of Rachmaninoff's obsession with this theme and the way he used it with the utmost care to bring out his message about life, love and death.

#### For Members Only

The afternoon was reserved for performances and presentations by members, providing all present with a splendid opportunity to get to know each other from a purely musical point of view! Valeria Nollan read some of her own poems inspired by Rachmaninoff and his music, with images that were both strong and intimate. The Members' Concert was opened with a moving performance of two works by Medtner by Rita Hamilton. The dedication of this performance to the memory of her late son-in-law added to the momentum and imbued it with emotion.

After Debra Takakjian's brilliant performance of the difficult and seductive *L'Isle Joyeuse* of Debussy, we shared Bahman Barekat's very personal interpretation of the *Prelude* Op. 28 No. 4 by Chopin and works by Tchaikovsky. He closed with two of his own Preludes which brought us, for the first time this weekend, well into the 21<sup>st</sup>

Century.

Sandro Russo played Medtner's *Tale Op. 8* No. 2 and ended with some staggering piano playing, of which the *Flight of the Bumblebee*, in the arrangement by Györgi Cziffra, practically brought the house down! The cherry on the top was provided by Rita Hamilton and Sandro Russo, who gave an impressive reading of the *Suite Op. 17* on the two grand pianos.



#### Coda

Needless to say, after the official part of the afternoon, music kept flowing, and to this mixture of Rachmaninovian sounds, I took my leave and found myself back in the reality of the present time and everyday life. The 2005 Conference most certainly matched the present level of professionalism of the Rachmaninoff Society and, as such, proved to be both most informative and inspiring.

Compliments go to the Administrator Bahman Barekat, to John Lockyer, Elger Niels, Wouter de Voogd, Judicaelle Hammond and all others who made this Conference possible. A special thanks to the distinguished musicians and speakers, the sponsors Blüthner and Temple University and last but not least, the Centre of Russian Music at Goldsmiths College!

Willem Scholtz



## COLOPHON

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# RACHMANINOFF SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 66 JUNE 2006

sounded excellently in the wooden-floored hall.

After dinner came Sandro Russo. I could give you a few facts about



Sandro Russo(l) & Elger Niels(r)

this phenomenon: a pianist of about my age, born in Italy and based in New York. I could also tell you what an elegant figure he cuts on stage, and how the music seems to possess him utterly as he plays, so that it ends up written on his face, on his every gesture. But as for the sound, the passion, the daring, well, that's harder to convey in mere words. He began with a solo group of three works, each more concentrated than the last. His performances of the Grieg Ballade and Rachmaninoff's Étude-tableau Op. 39 No. 5 were utterly ravishing and at times shockingly intense. But his transcendental account of Taneyev's Prelude and Fugue simply left nothing to be said. It was unreal; you just had to be there.



Then came an extremely rare complete performance of Rachmaninoff's Fifteen Songs Op. 26 with Russo now variously joining forces with Esther Putter (soprano), Elsbeth Gerritsen (mezzo soprano), Daan Verlaan (tenor) and Michel Poels (baritone). What surprised here was not just the exquisite quality of the performances but also how well these predominantly dark-hued songs work as a cycle. I was especially

struck by No. 3

'Come let us rest',

which

continually hovers between major and minor, allowing a faint ray of light in the final bar, and the climax of the final song 'All things depart', which was built up with colossal power by Russo and Poels. It all brought the house down. Thank heavens this concert was recorded!

Still not fully recovered from all this, I found myself back at Cristofori the following morning, attending a lecture by Elger Niels. Also amazed by what he had heard, Elger recognised that a powerpoint presentation wouldn't suit the ethereal mood, scrapped his plans and instead focused on the significance and style of Op. 26. In particular he



Putter, Gerritsen, Verlaan, Poels, Russo

drew attention to the stillness that is found in many of these settings – like No. 3 – very plausibly linking this to the tragic events of Bloody Sunday in 1905, a year before Rachmaninoff composed his cycle. 'And Rachmaninoff was not the only composer to find stillness' he added, playing the opening bars of the ghostly Prelude Op. 51 No. 2 by Scriabine, also written in 1906; a fascinating parallel. He moved on to discuss the style, form and interpretation of Rachmaninoff's 2<sup>nd</sup> Symphony.

This led beautifully on to probably the best lecture I've ever attended, if you can call it a lecture. Ian Flint from England, a former professional pianist now working in the commercial sector, possesses the rare gift of explaining complicated things in an understandable and entertaining way. He took us step by step through the harmonic characteristics of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Symphony's glorious slow movement, demonstrating its multi-layered textures at the piano. At



Flint, van Caspel, Monasch, McKelvie

first he looked at the components in isolation and, as he pointed out, they seemed unremarkable on their own. But then he assembled them – playing very beautifully I might add – showing all the unexpected twists and turns in harmony, how the whole things seems to unwind into infinity. And as Ian shifted from details to the whole, the weight of Rachmaninoff's colossal genius was felt. Fantastic.

After the Society auction, conducted with typical panache by John Lockyer, we were off to the

Concertgebouw.

It's a very grand, but also very intimate, venue that fully lives

up to its reputation as one of the world's great concert halls. There we heard the Radio Philharmonic Orchestra under Jaap van Zweden, who accompanied Sarah Chang in the Sibelius Violin Concerto before tackling Rachmaninoff's 2<sup>nd</sup> Symphony. We sat quite close to the stage, but in the first half this meant I got an earful of Ms Chang's massive tone and an eyeful of her good looks, so I can't complain. Van Zweden's interpretation of the symphony was quite traditional in



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# RACHMANINOFF SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 69 JULY 2007



significantly to this successful performance.

Preceding this "Grand Finale," Sandro Russo performed Rachmaninoff's 2<sup>nd</sup> Sonata with great panache. Clothed in elegant black attire, he deferentially announced some of his own revisions in the first and third movements. The music was executed with great polish and confidence. From my personal perspective, Mr. Russo's sound world incorporated a mix of lush Chopinesque subtlety, Lisztian command, and Mozartian elegance. As beautiful as Russo's per-



(l. to r.) Mr. Russo, Mr. Javier, Mr. Golka  
 performance was, I sometimes missed the spiritual depth inherent in Rachmaninoff's music. The contrast between Golka's and Russo's approach puts this into relief. Having said this, I have high regard for Mr. Russo's genius and creative mastery of the piano.

Mr. Golka's understanding of the 'Russian soul' was also present in his performance of Nicolai Medtner's *G Minor Sonata*. I was not familiar with this work, but Golka endeared me to it. I would imagine that a performer with less talent could not have pulled it off. Medtner's work is rather heavy and lacks much of Rachmaninoff's melodic invention. Nevertheless, Golka was able to extract beautiful high tones from a rich palette in the low and middle registers of the piano. He made the work interesting and highly emotional. This technically demanding work is about twenty-five minutes in duration, enough to expend most performers' energy. But, Golka played the Rachmaninoff concerto thirty minutes later.

Starting off the evening gala session were a performance by Jung Lin and lecture by David Dubal. Ms. Lin gave elegant performances of two solo piano transcriptions by Rachmaninoff: *Lilacs, Op. 21, No. 5* and *Daisies, Op. 38, No. 3*. She was also scheduled to perform the *Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op. 42*. Unfortunately because she was under the weather, the Variations were not performed.

David Dubal, author, pianist, WQXR-FM radio host and Julliard Professor of Piano Literature gave a lecture on Rachmaninoff's life, which included some anecdotal information and interesting recordings of Rachmaninoff as

pianist and conductor. The lecture was supposed to end at 8:00 P.M., allowing time for the three performances mentioned earlier. Mr. Dubal's lecture went to 8:20 P.M. This permitted no time for introductory comments from the performers or questions from the audience following Dubal's lecture. Fortunately, this was the only snarl for the entire day.

There were many wonderful activities earlier during the afternoon session in the Henry Z. Room, second floor of Steinway Hall. The session began with Elizabeth Wolff performing Rachmaninoff's *Etudes-Tableaux, Op. 33*. Prior to the performance, she commented on some interesting compositional aspects of the pieces (e.g., choice of key, tonal color, diatonic and chromatic devices). Ms. Wolff's performance was engaging and emotionally charged. Most important, she was able to express the individuality of poetic mood in each work.

Following this was a delightful lecture on the operas of Rachmaninoff by Dr. Jasmin Cowin. Besides being a faculty member of Hunter College and an active harp soloist, Dr. Cowin has lectured extensively on opera and music history. This experience was evident in her presentation. Not having a background in opera, I learned a great deal of valuable information concerning Rachmaninoff's *Aleko*, *The Miserly Knight*, and *Francesca da Rimini*. Her

comments on origin of plots, musical treatment, and reception history were especially interesting.

During Dr. Cowin's lecture, Soprano Liora Michelle sang two selected arias from two of the operas accompanied by Rita Anthoine on the piano. Ms. Michelle's wonderful voice and dramatic presentation were inspiring. Rita Anthoine as piano accompanist was very musically responsive to the nuances of Ms. Michelle's voice.



Following a short break with delicious cookies, pianist Vladimir Leyetchkiss performed some less-known works of Russian Romantics. Prokofiev, Kalinnikov, Borodin, Liadov, and Scriabin were featured. The *Suite of Waltzes* by Schubert/Prokofiev and *Poeme Tragique, Op. 34* by Scriabin were particular notable. Mr. Leyetchkiss is quite engaging as a performer. He is one of the last pupils of Heinrich Neuhaus from the Moscow Conservatory.

The last event of the afternoon session was a master class by eminent

## Baroque Band, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Mostly Music

By M.L. RANTALA  
Classical Music Critic

It's rare to walk away from a performance of a well-known work and realize that you've just heard something new, fresh and terribly exciting. But that's exactly what happened when violinist Monica Huggett joined the Baroque Band at the Hyde Park Union Church on Thursday for a spectacular rendition of Vivaldi's "Four Seasons."

Huggett convinced you almost immediately that this music had seeped into her very bones. All the liberties she took concerning rhythm, meter and even intonation together created the very best of an idiosyncratic performance: one that revealed the music anew, one that kept you raptly attentive and one that made you wonder just what further magic would come after the magic you had just heard.

This was an energetic "Four Seasons." You could taste the ale at the inn, feel the wind at your back, smell the flowers in bloom. In the spring movement, Huggett teamed with Baroque Band founder and violinist Gary Clarke and violinist Martin Davids to produce exquisite bird calls. Summer yielded both heat and light. Huggett's hunting calls in autumn were raw and raucous. She purposely stumbled about on stage as she drew out the halting rhythms, and then tweaked some of the pitches to underline the jolly nature of the underlying

ideas. The squeaky, slashing opening to winter was indeed icy.

This was a "Four Seasons" full of the variety of nature. The strings were lush at points, but Huggett also coaxed out thinness when needed. She was an exuberant leader of musicians, at times putting her finger to her lips to ensure the sound was soft, at others using her bow like a sword, to urge the others to bring it all on.

The program itself was also a little unusual. Each of the two parts began without Huggett, in fine performances of short concertos. Then the "Four Seasons" was broken up, too. The first two movements ended the first half and the last two ended the second half. Going into intermission, there was loud foot-stomping approval from the modestly sized audience. As I had my head buried in my notebook furiously writing at the end of the concert, I wondered why the foot-stomping had so quickly stopped. It was because the listeners were now on their feet, offering a standing ovation.

It was a truly marvelous performance I may never forget.

The University of Chicago Presents season has begun and this year it starts with a festival dedicated to Olivier Messiaen. Friday night the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra came to Mandel Hall with Pierre-Laurent Aimard serving as conductor as well as

piano soloist for the final work on the program.

Tamara Stefanovich was the piano soloist for the great French composer's "Oiseaux exotiques" and brought muscularity and pointed control to the work. The orchestra offered bold colors and careful attention.

The highlight of the evening was Aimard's beautiful reading of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 in G major. He's a pianist of great gifts, notably his graceful fluidity. He commands the music without ever beating up on it. The orchestra gave its very best performance yet in Hyde Park, with a cohesive, virtuosic flair that elicited whoops from the appreciative audience.

The concert opened with a pleasing account of Claude Debussy's "Petite Suite" in the arrangement by Henri Büsser.

Mostly Music Chicago (MMC) (previously Mostly Music at NEIU and before that simply Mostly Music) continues to prove that a small classical music organization can provide something the big fellows can't. MMC makes a virtue of its small audiences by holding recitals in the intimate confines of private homes. The Hyde Park season kicked off in the charming row house of Bill and Marianne Hammett, where splendid music was followed by a splendid reception.

Thirty-year-old Sandro Russo, an Italian pianist who now makes Queens, New York

his home base, served up a satisfying meal made up mostly of transcriptions. It included the world-premiere performance of Evanston-based Vladimir Leyetchkiss' transcription of two movements of Rachmaninoff's Second Suite for Two Pianos. Russo displayed all the work's harmonic warmth in an agile and forceful performance of the Waltz and the Romance. Leyetchkiss, who was in the audience, told me at the reception that he was delighted with Russo's handling of the piece.

The Sunday afternoon recital started with Feinberg's transcription of the Largo from the Trio Sonata for Organ No. 5. Russo's serenity and confidence made for a reading that was both collected and affectionate. Liszt's Variations on "Weinen Klagen Sorgen Zagen" was marred by repeated interruptions of telephones, but this didn't stop Russo's crisp attention to detail, particularly in the chromatic passages packed with musical drama. Afterwards he joked that he thought it might have been Liszt himself trying to call.

The Andante Spinato and Grand Polonaise Brillante by Chopin were well articulated and Taneyev's Prelude and Fugue in G-sharp minor built into compelling complexity. But Russo's showcase moment was with Liszt's "Reminiscences de Don Juan" based on themes from Mozart's Don Giovanni. Russo drew out all the heart-pounding intensity and had the floor shaking.

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# Italian Piano Virtuoso, Sandro Russo, Transforms Northrop House Museum into World-Class Concert Hall

Text and Photos by Hildegard M. Grob

*At the invitation of the Sherman Historical Society (SHS), concert-pianist, Sandro Russo, transformed the parlor of the Northrop House Museum on Friday evening, May 7, into a world-class concert hall with his flawlessly performed renditions of piano works ranging from Beethoven to contemporary composer, Lowell Liebermann.*

Seated in the two parlors, the audience rewarded the deeply lyrical performance with a standing ovation. Someone likened the artist's slender hands to hummingbirds fluttering across the ivory keys, barely touching down, while eliciting the most beautiful sounds.

The occasion for the piano recital was the dedication of the Rogers' Steinway Piano, which was donated to the Society by the Rogers Estate after the death of long-time Sherman resident, Malyn Rogers Kamenoff. The piano has been in Sherman over 100 years and was moved to Northrop House Museum after being professionally restored by Tali Mahanor who grew up in Sherman and has kept close ties to her hometown. Under the magical touch of Mr. Russo's hand,

the Rogers' Steinway Piano, a New York Upright Model F, came to life and captured the audience with the richness of its sound.

Mr. Russo expressed his appreciation for the parlor setting. "This kind of small, intimate setting is very dear to me," he said while pointing out that house concerts were wildly popular throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Asked what he liked about the Rogers' Steinway piano in particular, he answered that the ivory keys were a rarity today and that they had a lovely touch. "This piano - although small - has a very sweet sound, even after all this time."

According to Miss Mahanor, the instrument was in very good condition when she received it at her shop. "I was especially pleased to find out that the piano came with

a complete diary that logged every step in the manufacturing process," Miss Mahanor emphasized. "We thus know that the piano was completed on 18 February 1892 and shipped by rail to the Hickock & Smith Music Company in Poughkeepsie, NY." It is not entirely clear as to when the Rogers family came into the possession of the piano. The instrument was sold on 18 June 1892 to a Mrs. Mary Sherwood of Pawling, NY, a distant relative. Family records confirm that the piano was in the Rogers' home at Maplemont Farm on Rte 37 South by 1908, which would place the instrument in Sherman over 100 years!



Sandro Russo grew up in Sicily where he studied the piano from early childhood on. Since coming to the United States in 2000, he has had an impressive career as a piano soloist. Mr. Russo has won numerous prestigious awards, including first prizes in the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra Competition and the 25<sup>th</sup> Frinna Averbuch Competition. Among his many musical accomplishments is his 2009 recording made on the vintage 1862 Bechstein #576 owned by Franz Liszt at the Bechstein Piano Centre in New York. His repertoire comprises well-known masterpieces of all periods as well as more obscure works by composers such as Medtner, Sorabji, Blumenfeld, and others.



NY/SPLENDIDAMENTE AIUTATO DA UN CONCERTO DI INSIGNI MUSICISTI VENUTI DA VICENZA

# Steve Acunto fa centro al tiro a segno

di Antonino Ciappina

Tempio dell'arte il "Tiro a segno? Lo ha promosso Steve Acunto, "deus ex machina" dell'Italian Academy Foundation di New York, sempre in preda alla bramosa ricerca di nuovi talenti, nuovi portenti, nuovi orizzonti. Ed essendo al "Tiro a segno" non poteva mancare di far centro! Poteva non fare bersaglio laddove si mira sempre a far quadrato; a far beffa anche al fato?

Con chi ha fatto centro? Con l'Orchestra del Teatro Olimpico di Vicenza, che qui dall'Italia ha portato, e che giovedì sera, 12 c.m. s'è esibita diretta da Giancarlo De Lorenzo; il suo grande maestro, che con la sua bacchetta ha mietuto fragorosi applausi da un pubblico scelto: un centinaio di soci; gente d'alta classe, il circolo accessibile solo ad esponenti della comunità italiana ed italoamericana di spiccato spirito patriottico, somma levatura culturale; ideale connubio d'acme e zenit; la perfezione.

A collaborare con Steve Acunto è stato Marc Corea, l'organizzatore capo che ha organizzato tutto a puntino. Il concerto è stato preceduto da un ricevimento nel corso del quale s'è brindato all'amicizia con calici traboccanti di Chianti, Asti spumante ed Amaretto di Saronno come aperitivo, in anticipazione del lauto pranzo che ha fatto seguito al trattenimento musicale.

I concerti sono stati due: uno in do per flauto e orchestra, con pezzi scelti di Georg Philip Telemann, musicista tedesco che fu amico di Johann Sebastian Bach; uno dei maggiori artefici della fioritura del primo teatro operistico tedesco. Vissuto tra il 1681 e 1767, di massima compose musica sacra, questo il motivo per cui non molto noto dove si coltiva musica da camera. Ma i pezzi scelti sono stati indovinatissimi; alitavano d'un respiro musicale ch'era carezza alla mente ed all'anima. Alla carezza ha molto contribuito la solista-flautista Elena Contin.

Faceva seguito un concerto in c per mandolino ed orchestra, anch'esso d'esecuzione eccezionale, con l'ascesa alla vetta strumentale raggiunta dalla solista-mandolinista Cecilia Loda, oltre meritevole d'ogni lode, come postula il suo cognome, e ardenti battimani, favoriti dalla sua "madrina di battesimo": Santa Cecilia, patrona della musica secondo il Martirologio Ro-



mano. Ma le meraviglie non son finite con Giancarlo De Lorenzo, Elena Contin, Cecilia Loda e tutto il complesso orchestrale, affiatatissimo ed eccellentissimo. V'è stato un altro solista: il pianista Sandro Russo che ha addirittura portato tutti in delirio carezzando e battendo i tasti, a seconda del pentagramma al comando, interpretando con veemenza entusiasta e perfetta adesione un pezzetto di Franz Liszt, un altro di Frederic Chopin ed uno del contemporaneo Marc-Andrè Hamelin, in un magnifico "Etude" che arieggiava "La Danza" di Rossini, facendo a tutti sentire un desiderio; una brama di tarantella.

Dopo la delizia del rapimento estatico del concerto si è avuto il coronamento della serata con la premiazione di un attore, scrittore, direttore e produttore italoamericano: Tony Lo Bianco, che da Steve Acunto ha ricevuto un attestato con una magnifica motivazione, sormontata dall'esclamazione classica per tutte ogni super-ascesi ed affermazione: "Bravo". Ospite d'onore della serata, Tony lo Bianco era con la moglie: una splendida donna, incarnazione d'un sogno trasumanato; vero dono di Dio Ennesima prova, ove ve ne fosse bisogno, che la donna è il dono migliore da Dio fatto all'uomo.

Alla serata non è mancato il conferimento d'un accento di pregnante solennità: era presente il Ministro Francesco Maria Talò, Console Generale d'Italia a New York, invitato da Steve Acunto per due titoli: oltre ad essere il "deus ex machina" dell'Italian Academy Foundation, è anche Vice Console Onorario della contea di Westchester.

*Nelle foto, dall'alto, in senso orario, il dottor Francesco Maria Talò e Steve Acunto; Steve Acunto con Tony Lo Bianco; il complesso venuto da Vicenza; Tony Lo Bianco con la moglie.*

(Foto Antonino Ciappina)

**CONCERTO DI DINOROSI, LA "VOCE DI NAPOLI", QUEENS LIBRARY, STEINWAY, ASTORIA**  
Sabato 15 marzo, con inizio alle 2 pomeridiane, presso la Queens Library (Biblioteca Pubblica) di Queens, Astoria/Steinway Branch (ramo staccato della biblioteca), 21-45 31.a Strada, Astoria, si potrà ascoltare Dino Rosi, la "voce di Napoli", che intratterrà l'uditorio dando la stura a canzoni napoletane miste a motivi classici italiani nel contesto d'un concerto intitolato: "From Italy with Love" (Dall'Italia con Amore). Il concerto è ad ingresso libero. Per ulteriori informazioni, gli interessati potranno formare il n. (718) 728-1965 o visitare il web-site: [www.queenslibrary.org](http://www.queenslibrary.org).

**FESTA DI SAN PATRIZIO DEI "BOY SCOUTS/NEW UTRECHT CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH, BROOKLYN**  
Sabato 15 marzo i "Boy Scouts" della "Troop 20" (Truppa 20.a) terranno la Festa di San Patrizio, in anticipo rispetto alla data tradizionale, così come per la festa di San Giuseppe, la Pasqua quest'anno essendo prestaiola, nella "Parish House" (Sala parrocchiale) della New Utrecht Christian Reformed Church, 1831 84.a Strada/18.a Avenue, Bensonhurst/Little Italy di Brooklyn. Si potrà gustare un pranzo tipicamente irlandese in onore di San Patrizio, venerato come Patrono dell'Irlanda. Nato a Glasgow, Gran Bretagna, il suo nome di nascita era Scott, figlio di un legionario romano e d'una donna del luogo. Riuscito a guadagnare l'Irlanda a Cristo con la sua opera di proselitismo, divenne l'apostolo dell'isola. Invitato a Roma per ricevere gli allori della sua conquista al Cristianesimo, dal papa venne chiamato "Patrizio", Padre Nobile dell'Irlanda. Il pranzo in onore di San Patrizio sarà tipicamente irlandese con "corned beef" (carne di manzo conservata in scatola, secondo apposita tradizione), Irish soda (bevanda gassata tipicamente irlandese), rye bread (pane di segala, anch'esso tipica-

mente irlandese), oltre a patate cucinate in una dozzina di maniere, tutte irlandesi. Per ulteriori informazioni, gli interessati potranno formare il n. (917) 605-8334.

**ANNUAL DINNER DANCE DEI BROOKLYN ITALIANS A EL CARIBE**

Sabato 15 marzo 2008 si terrà il 33mo dinner dance dei Brooklyn Italians presso El Caribe - 5945 Strickland Ave., Brooklyn, NY. Saranno onorati, il consigliere Dominick Recchia come uomo dell'anno e Giulio Mancuso come sportsman dell'anno. Allieterà la serata la musica dei Caleps.

**SPETTACOLO DI VARIETÀ "MUSICAL CARNIVAL", WESTCHESTER COMMUNITY COLLEGE, VALHALLA (N.Y.)**  
Domenica 16 marzo, presso il Westchester Community College, 75 Grasslands Road, Valhalla (N.Y.), si potrà assistere ad uno speciale "Variety Show"; esattamente un "Musical Carnival", grazie ad iniziativa del Club Italiano dell'ateneo nell'Academic Arts Theatre, A dare lo spettacolo sarà "The Frizzi & Lazzi", Old Time Italian American Music & Theatre Company. L'inizio è previsto per le 4 pomeridiane., Vi è ampio spazio per il parcheggio, lotti 2 e 4. Per informazioni, n. (914) 606-6790 Fax (914) 606-6429.

**CELEBRAZIONE BILINGUE DELLE "TENEBRE" NELLA CHIESA DI ST.FINBAR, 138 BAY 20TH STREET, BROOKLYN**  
Lunedì 17 marzo e mercoledì 19 marzo, nella Chiesa di San Finbar (Upper Church/piano superiore), verranno celebrate le "Tenebrae": lunedì in spagnolo, il mercoledì in inglese, con inizio alle 7,30 p.m. Si tratta d'una celebrazione tradizionale, d'origine latina; di un rito durante il quale si commemora la passione, morte e resurrezione di Gesù Cristo.

La celebrazione viene definita una commemorazione dei "Sacri Misteri Pasquali" (Sacred Paschal Mysteries, in inglese). Tutta la comunità è invitata. Per informazioni n. (718) 236-3312 Fax (718) 236-3750

## IL CALENDARIO

**PROCESSIONE DEL VENERDÌ SANTO CHIESA MEDAGLIAMIRACOLOSA, QUEENS**  
Venerdì 21 marzo, in Ridgewood (Queens), si terrà la tradizionale Processione del Venerdì Santo con inizio alle 6,30 dalla Chiesa della Medaglia Miracolosa 62-81 60.a Strada, angolo Bleecker Street, Ridgewood/Queens. Verranno portati in processione simulacri di Cristo Crocifisso e di Maria Addolorata. Parteciperanno alla processione fedeli delle seguenti chiese: Santa Margherita, Santa Brigida, Sant'Aloisio, San Mattia, San Pancrazio, Sacro Cuore e Madonna della Speranza (Our Lady of Hope), con i parrochiani della Chiesa della Medaglia Miracolosa. Parteciperanno anche dirigenti e soci delle seguenti associazioni: Bisacquino, Castelveteranesi d'America, Concordia Partanna, Montevago, Polizzi Generosa, San Gerardo Maiella, Santa Margherita Belice, Zagara. La processione avrà inizio alle 6,30 pomeridiane. Durante la processione si ascolterà una predica speciale del rev. Stefano Aguggia, direttore dell'Apostolato Italiano. Tutta la comunità è invitata a partecipare; coloro che aderiranno all'invito sono esortati a portare una candela. Per informazioni, gli interessati potranno chiamare la canonica (Rectory) della Chiesa della Medaglia Miracolosa (718) 366-3360, oppure Tony Mule, presidente dell'Associazione Cattolica Italiana, chiamandolo al n. (718) 366-9755 o (347) 334-6070.

## ~ Translation Review ~

> **Recital for the “Tiro a Segno Foundation,” NYC, March 2008.**

...Pianist Sandro Russo sent the crowd wild caressing and attacking the keys – in accordance with the interpretive demands – performing Chopin, Liszt, and a contemporary work by M.A. Hamelin with a passionate vehemence and perfect aplomb. Hamelin’s magnificent Etude on Rossini’s “La Danza” evoked in the audience a desire for “Tarantella.”

“America Oggi” March 15, 2008



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## Chopin secondo Russo A Palermo rassegna di giovani talenti

**PALERMO.** (spa) Pianoforte in area di sottigliezza, giovedì sera al Ss. Salvatore, altro appuntamento nel novero del ciclo di «Nuove carriere», con Sandro Russo in un programma di ricercate trascrizioni che incastonavano due Chopin, le «Variazioni» op. 12 e la «Polacca-Fantasia» op. 61. Il giovane pianista siciliano che risiede a New York, nella cristallina nitidezza delle sonorità e nell'accurata rarefazione del suono che non si negava a momenti di più rilevato spessore, ha messo in luce una propensione all'intimismo e alla preziosità, con alato dominio nell'acrobatico «Volo del calabrone» di Rimski-Korsakov nella trascrizione di Cziffra.

**~TRANSLATION REVIEW~**

Recital for the “Nuove Carriere” Music Festival in Palermo, Italy, 9 November, 2002

**“Chopin according to Russo”**

There was subtle pianoforte playing Thursday evening at the Ss. Salvatore auditorium in Palermo by Sandro Russo, who made his appearance for “Nuove Carriere” presenting a program of rare piano transcriptions, which also included Chopin’s Variations Brillantes Op.12, and the Polonaise Fantasie Op.61.

The young Sicilian-born pianist who currently lives in New York, projects crystalline clarity in sonorities, and transparency of sound, which, however, did not lack moments of extreme intensity. He displayed a propensity for intimacy, meticulousness, and a soaring acrobatic virtuosity in the Flight of the Bumblebee arranged by Gyorgy Cziffra.

Sara Patera, “Giornale di Sicilia”