

Plano's free concert gives a taste of what's to come

By Keith Powers, Contributing Writer

Posted at 3:01 AM

With an artfully crafted program that not only showed off his virtuosity, but his musical insights as well, pianist Roberto Plano performed compositions of Liszt, Ginastera, Gershwin and others Tuesday evening at the Zeiterion Performance Arts Center.

The recital was a free community event, sponsored by the Z and by the New Bedford Symphony Orchestra. The NBSO will host Plano in the spring, for an unusual and challenging program that includes both of the Ravel piano concertos.

Plano has appeared twice previously with the NBSO—for concertos by Beethoven and Schumann—but this was a chance to see him performing works close to his own heart, and in a program entirely of his own devising.

It was masterfully conceived. The first half was devoted to Liszt—but not the thunderous Liszt that perhaps most are familiar with. Plano chose five selections from Liszt's "Harmonies poétiques et religieuses," re-sequenced for his own artistic reasons.

The meditative and austere "Hymn of the Awakening Child" began the performance. It set the mood for an investigation of Liszt's introspective side, delicately revealed in the andante lagrimoso movement, and explored fully with the multiple moods of "Funérailles."

This culminating section, which opens in deep gloom, a left-hand tolling figure signaling the mood, alternates sharply between the heroic and the downhearted.

Plano attacked without pause from movement to movement in the first half, not because the music was written that way, but following his own artistic ideas. He played with a prodigious left-hand motor. He also underlined Liszt's frequent choice to surround a melody — keeping it in the middle of the keyboard, with harmonies and ornaments above and below—by crossing over hands to play.

It was a formidable physical approach, almost as fun to watch as it was to listen to, and continued in bravura fashion after intermission. Music in the second half of the program came from the Americas—South Americans Piazzolla, Villa Lobos and Ginastera — and Gershwin, his inimitable "Rhapsody in Blue."

Milongas—a dance with a syncopated beat, used in this case in more stylized manner—from Piazzolla and Ginastera added a deceptively simple flavor to the performance. Deceptive because while the melody seemed simple, almost folksy, the beat underneath had a sneaky seriousness.

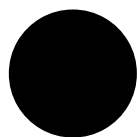
Ginastera's bold "Suite de Danzas Criollas" highlighted the South American portion. Five movements, some poetic, some smashingly discordant, seemed to travel many musical miles in just a short period.

"Rhapsody in Blue" closed the evening with a populist touch. Its unforgettable opening phrase—even in this piano arrangement, one can still hear the gliding clarinet figure of the orchestral version—sets the mood for a foray into the intersection of jazz and classical music.

Plano played beautifully. He attacks the instrument with romantic flourish, but in a confident, classical, posture-perfect style. Even with the most virtuosic challenges, his playing remains secure, effortless.

As a ploy (it certainly wasn't just that) to encourage this audience to return in May for his dual-concerto performance with the NBSO, this recital could not have worked better.

The NBSO's next program will be Sat., Nov. 26 at 3 p.m. in the Zeiterion Performing Arts Center. For information and tickets visit www.nbsymphony.org or call the Z box office at 508-994-2900.



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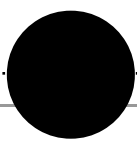
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