



ALEKSEY SEMENENKO, violinist



"Semenenko demonstrated an unparalleled level of refined musicianship and stage presence. He imbued every moment with meaning." – **THE STRAD**

"Aleksey Semenenko opened the concert with an elegant account of Mozart's Concerto No. 5. He played with unfailing purity of tone, but also with wonderful spontaneity and humor."
– **THE NEW YORK TIMES**

"Mr. Semenenko chose works that highlighted his strengths; a powerful technique, rich tone and passionate approach. There was a fluidity and warmth to his playing throughout the program, which concluded with a joyous, bravura performance of Paganini's showpiece 'I Palpiti.'"
– **THE NEW YORK TIMES**

"A moving and passionate performance...Semenenko played with stunning technique and intonation, verve, wit, and beautiful phrasing."
– **THE BOSTON MUSICAL INTELLIGENCER**

"Semenenko's strengths include musical ideas that are detailed, logical and appealingly impetuous. In Ysaÿe's 'Ballade,' his architecture was masterful. This was fine music-making. In the Beethoven, his wide variety of articulations explored every corner of the composer's imagination."
– **THE WASHINGTON POST**

"I found myself particularly drawn to the artistry of violinist Aleksey Semenenko, who played with deep sensitivity and chamber-like focus... this was a genuinely masterful performance."
– **STRINGS MAGAZINE**

"Semenenko held the audience in thrall from first note to last, providing continual astonishment and delight with the beauty of his tone, the breathtaking fluency of his technique, and the inescapable communicative power of his personality." – **SPOKESMAN-REVIEW**

Second Prize, 2015 Queen Elisabeth Competition
First Prize, 2015 Boris Goldstein International Violin Competition
First Prize, 2012 Young Concert Artists International Auditions
The Embassy Series Prize Concert in Washington, DC • The Friends of Music Concerts Prize
The Paramount Theatre Prize • The Usedom Music Festival Prize (Germany)
Top Prize, 2010 Moscow International Paganini Competition

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Photo: Christian Steiner



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ALEKSEY SEMENENKO, violinist

Ukrainian violinist **Aleksey Semenenko** was just named a BBC New Generation Artist, a coveted award for “the world’s most promising new talent” that provides the opportunity for concerts in London and around the UK; to record with BBC performing groups; and to be featured at the Cheltenham and Edinburgh Festivals. He previously captured international attention as Second Prize Winner of the prestigious 2015 Queen Elisabeth Violin Competition in Belgium. For his debut CD, *French Treasures*, released by ARS Produktion, Semenenko was lauded in *The Strad* for his “effortless virtuosity and finesse, heightened by beautifully drawn support from his partner Inna Firsova.”

Upcoming concerts in the United States include recitals at the Harvard Musical Association, Merkin Concert Hall, The Phillips Collection, a concerto appearance with the Spokane Symphony, and a return engagement with the Seattle Symphony. In Europe, Mr. Semenenko gives masterclasses at the Anton Rubinstein Music Academy in Düsseldorf, Germany, performs at Bonn University, and appears as soloist with the Orquesta Clásica Santa Cecilia in Spain, the Odessa Philharmonic in Ukraine, and the Dubrovnik Festival.

Mr. Semenenko made his acclaimed U.S. recital in the 2012 Young Concert Artists Series in New York, at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. He has appeared as soloist with the Orchestra of St. Luke’s at Lincoln Center’s Alice Tully Hall, about which *The New York Times* wrote: “Aleksey Semenenko gave an elegant account of Mozart’s Concerto No. 5 and was also notable for a lively stage presence, purity of tone, and wonderful spontaneity and humor.”

In Europe, Mr. Semenenko has been heard in recital at the Musée du Louvre in Paris, the Usedomer Musikfestival, Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and throughout Belgium and France. He has appeared as soloist with the National Symphony of Ukraine, the Pleven Philharmonic in Bulgaria, the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester in Berlin, the Kiev National Orchestra, the North Rhine-Westphalia Orchestra in Germany, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra under Manfred Honeck, and the National Philharmonic of Russia under Vladimir Spivakov. Subsequently, he was invited by the Spivakov Foundation to perform at the Kremlin in Moscow and at the Moscow International Performing Arts Center.

Born in Odessa, Aleksey Semenenko began his violin studies at the age of six with Zoya Mertsalova at the Stolyarsky School, and only a year later played Vivaldi’s *Violin Concerto in A Minor* with the Odessa Philharmonic. He currently works with Zakhar Bron at the Hochschule für Musik in Cologne. Mr. Semenenko plays a Stradivarius violin made in 1699, on loan from the Deutsche Stiftung Musikleben Fund of Hamburg, Germany.

ALEKSEY SEMENENKO, *violin*

REPERTOIRE WITH ORCHESTRA

BEETHOVEN	Concerto in D Major, Op. 61
BRAHMS	Concerto in D Major, Op. 77
CHAUSSON	<i>Poème</i> , Op. 25
GLAZUNOV	Concerto in A minor, Op. 82
MENDELSSOHN	Concerto in E minor, Op. 64
MOZART	Concerto No. 3 in G Major, KV. 216 Concerto No. 5 in A Major, KV. 219
PAGANINI	Concerto No. 1, Op. 6
PROKOFIEV	Concerto No. 1 in D Major, Op. 19 Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op. 63
SAINT-SAËNS	Concerto No. 3 in B minor, Op. 61 Introduction et rondo capriccioso, Op. 28
SCHUMANN	Concerto in D minor, WoO 23
SIBELIUS	Concerto in D minor, Op. 47
SHOSTAKOVICH	Concerto No. 1 in A minor, Op. 77 Concerto No. 2 in C-sharp minor, Op. 129
TCHAIKOVSKY	Concerto in D Major, O. 35 <i>Souvenir d'un lieu cher</i> , Op. 42
WAXMAN	<i>Carmen Fantasy</i>
WIENIAWSKI	Concerto No. 1 in F-sharp minor, Op. 14 Concerto No. 2 in D minor, Op. 22



Aleksey Semenenko, violinist

THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

MUSIC

Concert review: Violinist Aleksey Semenenko shows he's a rising star with symphony guest appearance

By Larry Lapidus Mon., March 26, 2018, 9:24 a.m.

If you have only enough time or patience to read one sentence of this review, you will at least come away having learned the name of violinist Aleksey Semenenko. **Most members of the audience at this weekend's performances at the Fox, where Semenenko performed with the Spokane Symphony, had also just heard his name for the first time, and they will treasure the experience of having encountered a great musician at an early stage of his career, before his name is added to the short list of artists who made a permanent mark on the performance history of their instrument.**

In his lecture before the concert, Music Director Eckart Preu quietly remarked that Semenenko had "very precise ideas" about how the piece he was to perform, "Symphonie Espagnole" (1875) by Édouard Lalo, should be interpreted. That resulted in **an interpretation of Lalo's familiar work that astonished** even those listeners who felt they knew it best. Instead of the engaging virtuoso showpiece we expected, **Semenenko's profound re-evaluation and flawless execution** revealed a masterful and serious concerto for violin and orchestra, worthy of consideration alongside the greatest examples of the type by Mendelssohn, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and Brahms. Soloist and orchestra accomplished this by executing details with scrupulous care, but never allowing momentary effect to stall the forward momentum of the piece or to break the long arch of its design.

Admirable as this musicianship may have been, Semenenko added to it a quality which is as hard to define as it is easy to recognize: star power. The young man held the audience in thrall from first note to last, providing continual astonishment and delight with the beauty of his tone, the breathtaking fluency of his technique, and the inescapable communicative power of his personality. Applause after each of the work's five movements was capped with a thunderous ovation at its conclusion, which was rewarded with a rendition of the first movement of Eugène Ysaÿe's Sonata for Solo Violin No. 5 (1924). Not only did Semenenko transcend its technical demands as though they did not exist, he again won the audience's heart by meeting Ysaÿe's definition of the ideal violinist: "... a thinker, a poet, a human being, he must have known hope, love, passion and despair, he must have run the gamut of the emotions in order to express them all in his playing."



Aleksey Semenenko, *violinist*

With Brevard Philharmonic Sunday: Award Winning Ukranian Violinist To Perform

The Transylvania Times / October 12, 2017, Brevard, NC

Aleksey Semenenko



Two spectacular internationally celebrated musicians will open the 41st season with the [Brevard Philharmonic](#) this Sunday, Oct. 15, at 3 p.m. in the [Porter Center](#) at [Brevard College](#). The program: Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Tchaikovsky. Cornelia Laemmler Orth is the conductor, and the afternoon's guest soloist will be violinist, Aleksey Semenenko, whose artistry and intensity have won him gold medals all over Europe and earned him triumphant reviews from the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

Semenenko's demanding performance schedule takes him all over the world. When the Philharmonic caught up with him via telephone this week, he was on a sentimental journey, at home in Ukraine, where he was one of the performers at the Golden Violins of Odessa Festival.

"It's a homecoming experience where I see and perform with so many of the friends and teachers from my childhood," he said.

Born in 1988 he began his study of the violin at age 6.

"My father brought me to this instrument," he said. "He was a clarinetist in the Odessa Philharmonic. He would bring me to every performance and even to rehearsals where I would sit close to him. My grandfather also played the clarinet." The obvious question would be, "Why then did they not recommend you take up the clarinet?" Aleksey laughed as he answered, "They both told me, 'Why would we want another homeless person in the family?'"

The violin proved to be the best possible choice for Semenenko, who was singled out early on and chosen to play as his school's representative at the Golden Violins Festival at the age of 7. A year later he made his debut with the Odessa Philharmonic. When Aleksey was 14, his father became ill. "That was the breakpoint for me," Aleksey said. "My father's death was the moment I got the desire to take the violin seriously."

From there, in 2012, he won the Young Concert Artists International Auditions in New York. In 2015, he was the winner of the International Boris Goldstein Violin Contest in Bern, Switzerland, and he made his debut with the Moscow Philharmonic soon after that.

Semenenko plays a 1699 Stradivarius which he was awarded after winning an audition in Hamburg, Germany. "The rules say one can only keep this incredible instrument until the age of 30. I have only one more year with it," he said. The Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto Aleksey will play with the [Brevard Philharmonic](#) on Sunday afternoon is one of his favorite pieces. "The music of Tchaikovsky goes straight to your heart," he said. "I especially love playing this composer for Americans who are so open with their feelings."

The *New York Times* praises his, "Powerful technique, rich tone and his romantic intensity." *Strings Magazine* raves about his, "... genuinely masterful performance, pulling the audience in from the beginning."



Aleksey Semenenko, violinist

the Strad | July 2017 | - Catherine Nelson

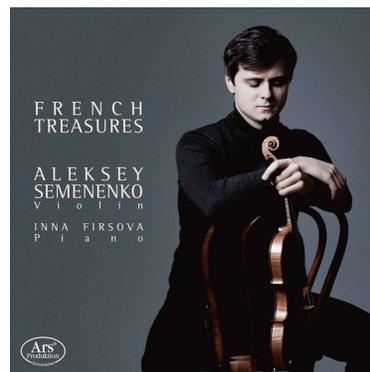
FRENCH TREASURES

An All-French program yields a strong debut for a young violinist

Aleksey Semenenko and Inna Firsova mine a rich seam on this disc of 'French Treasures', the passion and poetry of the vividly colored collection burnished to a rare gleam and captured in clear, warm sound. It marks the Ukrainian-born violinist's debut CD, and his effortless virtuosity and finesse is heightened by beautifully drawn support from regular chamber music partner Inna Firsova.

The arching lines of Poulenc's Sonata are etched with tenderness and spontaneity, from the brittle Allegro con fuoco to the dreamy, searching Intermezzo— an elegy to the poet Federico García Lorca. The final Presto tragico is furious and bittersweet, Semenenko and Firsova unfurling its tightly wound, enigmatic phrases with clear delight. Particularly impressive in these most ardent of works is Semenenko's daring to allow a bare, non-vibrato tone to surface in places, a perfect foil to the heady opulence of his tone color elsewhere. It gives extra light and shade to Chausson's sensuous *Poème*— in the composer's own arrangement for violin and piano— and though Semenenko does over-egg the glissandos in places, it's still a reading full of interpretative richness. In Heifetz's arrangement of *Prelude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, the same spare tone quality adds to the haunting wonder of its famous opening phrase.

The arrangement for *Clair de lune* is too breathy for my taste, but all told this is a strong debut from a promising young player, unafraid to dig deep to discover new bounty in these familiar gems.





Aleksey Semenenko, *violinist*

STRINGS

Review: Seattle Symphony's Shostakovich Concerto Festival

Thomas May | Strings | January 26, 2017



The Seattle Symphony just offered a rare chance to hear all six of Dmitri Shostakovich's solo instrumental concertos back-to-back in a two-day marathon (January 19–20) featuring three young virtuosos, all led by the ensemble's associate conductor, Pablo Rus Broseta.

I found myself particularly drawn to the artistry of 28-year-old Ukrainian violinist Aleksey Semenenko, who plays a Carlo Ferdinando Landolfi violin. Winner of the 2012 Young Concert Artists International Auditions and second prize winner at the 2015 Queen Elisabeth Competition in Belgium, Semenenko also plays in the Stolyarsky Quartet (which he founded).

The two violin concertos were presented in reverse order, with No. 2 in C-sharp minor, Op. 129, on the first concert and No. 1 in A minor, Op. 77, at the conclusion of the festival. If the piano concertos (especially the first) jab at Romanticism with the spear of parody, the Second Violin Concerto embeds a quietly desperate longing for heartfelt communication that at times finds itself stifled and deflected by the orchestra's interpolations. Semenenko's playing encompassed the needed extremes of rich, lush tone and austerity, evaporating at points to a vibrato-less, above-the-battle ghost. With Rus Broseta's sure guidance of the orchestra, the violinist played with deep sensitivity and chamber-like focus in his intimate exchanges with solo winds.

To this taste the highlight of the entire festival arrived with the epic First Violin Concerto, written during one of Shostakovich's crisis periods with the authorities (the postwar denunciations of 1948) and thus suppressed until he felt safe enough to unveil it in public in 1955, after Stalin's death. A few slight waverings in intonation aside, this was a genuinely masterful performance. Semenenko's powers of concentration pulled the audience in from



Aleksey Semenenko, *violinist*

STRINGS

Review: Seattle Symphony's Shostakovich Concerto Festival

Thomas May | *Strings* | January 26, 2017

his opening, spun-out solo in the first-movement nocturne. Much as Shostakovich cannot be reduced to an either/or figure (follower of the Party line/secret dissident), it does an injustice to his music to pigeonhole the tone of, say, the Scherzo as “sarcastic” music. Semenenko emphasized its kaleidoscopic animation and frenzy.

The weighty Passacaglia ranks among the most moving music Shostakovich ever wrote—here, ironically, constricting himself to the presets of an ancient, prescribed form. Like the First Cello Concerto, it culminates in a massive, powerful cadenza that is the violinist’s equivalent of a Shakespearean monologue—so it was in Semenenko’s performance, all the more effective with his careful, self-aware pacing of events that build to the *Burlesca* finale.



Aleksey Semenenko, *violinist*

The New York Times

Young Concert Artists Gala Offers Stars in the Making

James R. Oestreich | The New York Times | May 11, 2016



The violinist Aleksey Semenenko performing Mozart's Concerto No. 5 with the Orchestra of St. Luke's at Alice Tully Hall.

Credit: Hiroyuki Ito for The New York Times

With gratifying predictability, Young Concert Artists once again showcased three performers clearly bound for stardom in its annual gala concert on Tuesday evening at Alice Tully Hall. Over 55 years, the organization's track record in fostering the careers of rising performers has been remarkable, and it only distinguished itself further here.

By far the safest bet was Julia Bullock, 29, an American soprano who won first prize in the 2012 Young Concert Artists International Auditions, among several other awards. She has already established a career that many a veteran might envy, having recently sung the lead in Peter Sellars's production of Kaija Saariaho's "La Passion de Simone" for the Berlin Philharmonic's Orchestra Academy, a role she will repeat next month at the Ojai Festival in California.

Here Ms. Bullock sang Samuel Barber's masterpiece from 1947, "Knoxville: Summer of 1915," based on a highly atmospheric text from the prologue to James Agee's novel "A Death in the Family." She rendered the gorgeous yet not oversweet melodies beautifully, but there was much more than mere vocal allure: superb diction and a compelling stage manner that would have communicated much of the meaning even if the words had not registered so clearly.



Aleksey Semenenko, *violinist*

The New York Times

Young Concert Artists Gala Offers Stars in the Making

James R. Oestreich | *The New York Times* | May 11, 2016

Aleksey Semenenko, 27, a Ukrainian violinist and another winner in the 2012 auditions, opened the concert with an elegant account of Mozart's Concerto No. 5 and was also notable for a lively stage presence. He played with almost unfailing purity of tone, but also with wonderful spontaneity and humor.

Mozart supplied many odd little flourishes in this work and Mr. Semenenko adopted Robert Levin's latter-day cadenzas, yet the impetus in all of these seemed to be coming from Mr. Semenenko himself; if you didn't know better, you might have thought that he was making them up on the spot.

Yun-Chin Zhou, 26, a Chinese pianist and the first-prize winner of the 2013 auditions, provided the capper with Prokofiev's Concerto No. 3, and it was sensational. Mr. Zhou negotiated Prokofiev's prickly passagework at blistering speeds with immaculate fingering. As bravura pianism, the performance was brilliant and told much, though it gave little idea how Mr. Zhou might fare in more lyrical or Romantic fare. What's more, for all of Mr. Zhou's huge technique, his sound was not notably large, even in this intimate hall.

The Orchestra of St. Luke's displayed its usual versatility throughout, conducted by Michael Stern, the music director of the Kansas City Symphony, who had also obviously worked fruitfully with the soloists. Of the many fine individual contributions from the orchestra, note should be made of the playing of Stephen Taylor on oboe and English horn, especially in some glorious Barber moments.



The soprano Julia Bullock performing Samuel Barber's "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" with the Orchestra of St. Luke's, led by Michael Stern, on Tuesday at Alice Tully Hall. Credit: Hiroyuki Ito for The New York Times



Aleksey Semenenko, *violinist*

 Oberon's Grove

Young Concert Artists ~ Gala ~ 2016

Philip Gardner | Oberon's Grove | May 11, 2016



*Aleksey Semenenko, Michael Stern, Julia Bullock,
and Yun-Chin Zhou after tonight's exhilarating concert*

Music by three of my favorite composers - and an opportunity to hear three gifted young musicians in solo turns with the Orchestra of St. Luke's - drew me to the Young Concert Artists' annual gala at Alice Tully Hall in a state of eager anticipation. It was a wonderful evening, with a raptly attentive audience, and it ended with a full-house standing ovation following a magnificent performance of the Prokofiev third piano concerto.

After a cordial welcome from Susan Wadsworth, we greeted the Ukrainian violinist Aleksey Semenenko, who won the 2012 Young Concert Artists International Auditions, making his New York concerto debut playing Mozart's Violin Concerto # 5 in A major with the Orchestra of St. Luke's under the baton of Michael Stern. Mr. Semenenko looks extremely young. His playing was marked by a very nice sheen on the tone, beautifully connected registers, fine dynamic control, and a cadenza that was communicative in its own right.

During the orchestral introduction to the *Adagio*, the violinist looked pensive; then his sweet timbre emerged with grace, and decorously minute trills. One lovely melodic arc crested on a *ppp* high note of shimmering beauty. Throughout, his gradations of volume were finely calibrated, adding a poetic quality to the music. The gracious finale - a rondo/minuet movement - found the violinist in full virtuoso mode, with a charming touch of playfulness. A bit of a tempest is stirred up by Mozart, before returning to the main theme. Mr. Semenenko found the concerto's "Turkish" element most congenial, and he was warmly applauded by the music-lovers who had packed the hall.



Aleksey Semenenko, *violinist*



Berlioz piece and soloist Semenenko highlight ECSO concert

Gerald Moshell | The Day (Connecticut) | November 22, 2015

Maestro Toshiyuki Shimada has honed the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra, a fine and responsive group of instrumentalists, into a truly admirable ensemble, with their laudable attributes being on aural display Saturday evening in the second concert of their season at the Garde Arts Center.

The main work of the concert's first half, the Paganini Violin Concerto No. 1, featured Ukrainian Aleksey Semenenko, a winner of a number of prestigious international competitions, as soloist. High expectations greeted his arrival onstage, and he did not disappoint.

His is a full, rich sound, and he possesses a the-case-is-closed fabulous technique as well as — not always to be counted upon with virtuosi of this magnitude — a discerning musicianship and degree of nuance.

Assuming a confident, athletic stance, Semenenko dispatched the huge number of ferociously difficult multiple stops with the bracing ease of an evening stroll on a lovely autumn night; he absolutely nailed a stupefying number of high notes you'd think only Rin Tin Tin might be able to hear; and he elsewhere produced the sweetness that adagio movements demand of soloists but, alas, do not always receive.

Semenenko plays an 18th-century Landolfi violin but, with tone this gorgeous, who needs a Strad?

Shimada kept most everything in tight control — no mean feat — and though the ending of the half-hour concerto, as written, is a bit anti-climactic, the concerto came to a hardy, unifying conclusion.



Aleksey Semenenko, *violinist*

the Strad
ESSENTIAL READING FOR THE STRING MUSIC WORLD SINCE 1868

April 2015



A PROUD *INHERITANCE*

Dramatic readings of well-known repertoire prevailed at the International Boris Goldstein Violin Competition Bern, conceived by Zakhar Bron as a tribute to his former teacher. Rebecca Schmid reports

Despite his long career as a violinist and teacher, Boris Goldstein (1922–87) is not one of the most recognisable names in the pantheon of string players. The career of the Odessa-born musician was mostly confined to the Soviet Union – his precocious beginnings stymied by the post-war regime that turned against artists, intellectuals and especially Jews. It was with the aim of promoting awareness of Goldstein’s place in violin history that his former student Zakhar Bron founded the International Boris Goldstein Violin Competition Bern, which took place from 22–30 January this year. Bron also conceived the event as a way of honouring the man whom, after Igor Oistrakh, he still considers to be his most important mentor.

As a child prodigy, Goldstein received special protection from Stalin – not to mention praise from legendary figures such as Rachmaninoff and Kreisler – but he was not selected by authorities to perform in the West, unlike his more fortunate compatriots David Oistrakh and Mstislav Rostropovich. He nevertheless became famous in Russia, known for combining technical precision with a beautiful tone, and for the effectiveness of his fingerings. One source of income was as a tester of instruments in state collections – reportedly he knew exactly how to get the best possible sound out of inferior work. As a performer, however, he was forced on to secondary circuits, which paradoxically led to his developing an unusually wide repertoire, including music by Honegger and Bloch. He championed the works

of both of these Swiss composers (at that time, knowledge of Bloch’s Jewish roots had not crossed the Iron Curtain). He also taught at the Gnessin Institute in Moscow, where Zakhar Bron numbered among his students. After suffering increasingly hostile treatment, in 1974 he emigrated to Germany with his family, when he was well past his prime.

It was with his mentor’s legacy in mind that Bron selected the required works for the competition. Bloch’s Sonata no. 1 was included for the second round, where students also choose two pieces arranged by Jascha Heifetz (who had once called Goldstein ‘the USSR’s most brilliant violin talent’). The jury featured a Goldstein student from the Germany years, Michael Guttman, who was made aware of the event by Vadim Repin – himself a protégé of Bron’s, and whom Goldstein considered to be a kind of musical great-grandchild. Other jurors included Igor Ozim, Viktor Pikayzen and Ida Haendel, who voted by Skype from the US.

Guttman drew parallels between his erstwhile tutor’s teaching methods and those of Goldstein. ‘Much of Zakhar Bron’s demanding attitude towards his students comes from Boris Goldstein,’ he told me. ‘As friendly as he [Goldstein] was, right before and after each lesson he was a different man. He would demand more and more precision, and more and more sound. And, like Goldstein, Bron has a solution to any technical problem.’

The high number of Bron students who emerged as finalists caused some controversy on various online forums (see last issue). It was certainly noticeable that of the initial 31 participants, selected from 39 submissions, only a third were students of Bron. By the final round, only one – Benjamin Baker, who would emerge with sixth prize – had not studied with him. But although this fact might have seemed dubious from afar, once I had heard the finalists’ performances of Mozart concertos, with the Zakhar Bron Chamber Orchestra accompanying, I could only concur with most of the >



Aleksey Semenenko, *violinist*

the **Strad**

ESSENTIAL READING FOR THE STRING MUSIC WORLD SINCE 1869

jury's decisions. (Each finalist also performed a Romantic concerto with piano accompaniment.)

All of Bron's students, from the Grand Prix winner Mone Hattori to the fifth-placed Furong Li, boasted a robust low range, singing high notes and a strong but flexible bowing arm. This was perhaps most conspicuous in the small frame of Hattori, who collected CHF15,000 (£9,800) after performing Mozart's Concerto no.3 in the final round. Although I found her to be generally lacking in dynamic nuance and personality, her precocity emerged through her restrained, honeyed tone in the Adagio. Even stronger was Waxman's *Carmen Fantasy*, played at the prizewinners' concert the next day, which brought forth the required dose of cantabile and dramatic integrity despite the occasional harsh tone.

Both Aleksey Semenenko and Stefan Tarara, who tied for the first prize, demonstrated an unparalleled level of refined musicianship and stage presence. Semenenko in particular, performing Mozart's Concerto no.5, imbued every moment with meaning, creating an almost improvisatory feel in the opening Allegro, a melting, crying tone in the inner Adagio and, through expert use of rubato, a nearly operatic dialogue in the final Menuetto. In the winners' concert he turned Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Figaro Variations on a Theme by Rossini* into a mini-drama of its own, allowing the lines to speak with idiomatic Italian accents.

Although I was less charmed by Tarara's performance, there was no denying the professionalism with which he delivered Mozart's Concerto no.4, with its incisive attacks and use of colour across the violin, always with a specific dramatic purpose in mind. In the inner Andante he blended masterfully with the orchestra, only to retake command suddenly. He also rendered the chirping melody of the final Allegro with the most authenticity of any version that afternoon. If his performance of Paganini's *Introduction and Variations on 'Nel cor più non mi sento'* the following day was somewhat flashy, Tarara left the audience in no doubt of his technical prowess, his sharp grasp of musical form, and his fearless thespianism.

PHOTOS: MARC BLESSING



Top Cantabile and dramatic integrity from Mone Hattori
Left Aleksey Semenenko imbued every moment with meaning

'When a real talent arrives, that is always a unique thing,' said Bron, also stating his hope that the competition would provide a platform for young talented artists who deserved to be associated with his tutor's name. This first iteration of the contest appeared to have done just that, with many of the finalists demonstrating an ability to interpret each of the required pieces with freedom and confidence, while also respecting a given work's stylistic boundaries. It will be interesting to see how many names on this edition's roster will go on to enjoy the international fame that eluded Goldstein for so much of his life. ●

WINNERS

- GRAND PRIX
Mone Hattori, 15 (Japan)
- FIRST PRIZE
Stefan Tarara, 28 (Germany);
Aleksey Semenenko, 26 (Ukraine)
- THIRD PRIZE
Shiori Terauchi, 24 (Japan)
- FOURTH PRIZE
Arsenis Selalmazidis, 24 (Greece/Russia)
- FIFTH PRIZE
Furong Li, 24 (China)
- SIXTH PRIZE
Benjamin Baker, 24 (New Zealand/UK)



Aleksey Semenenko, *violinist*

musicalamerica
WORLDWIDE

New Artist of the Month: Aleksey Semenenko

Rebecca Schmid | MusicalAmerica.com | March 1, 2015

BERLIN – The tension was high at the first International Boris Goldstein Violin Competition in Bern last January. As it turned out, all but one of the winners were students of Zakhar Bron, himself a living legend for having trained soloists such as Vadim Repin and Daniel Hope. (At least one pundit found this scandalous, since Bron was on the jury.)

But there was one player who, at least for this listener, blew the others out of the water in terms of musical sensitivity. In an afternoon of only Mozart Violin Concertos, Aleksey Semenenko managed to make the Fifth fresh and exciting.



The opening Allegro aperto conveyed a childish joy without overindulging the melodies' spritely qualities. The inner Adagio combined melting climaxes with a searing bittersweetness. In the closing fast movement (Tempo di Menuetto), Semenenko had no problem soaring above and even distracting from the wayward horns of the Zakhar Bron Chamber Orchestra.

The 26 year old is not for a moment pretentious. His eyes radiate a glowing warmth, only to recede into a profound introspective gaze.

"It is not easy for me to play Mozart," he tells me when we meet at a Berlin café. "But he has nevertheless been my favorite composer since I was a child. The music is so pure and at the same time brings out feelings in me that are otherwise scarcely possible to connect with – every time."

The competition carries a particular meaning for Semenenko, who emerged as one of the two First Prize winners. The event's namesake, Boris Goldstein, a child prodigy who remained confined to the Soviet Union for most of his life, was born in Semenenko's native city of

Odessa, Ukraine. As a student of the Stolyarsky School, Semenenko stands directly in a tradition that includes not just Goldstein and Bron (his current teacher) but also David and Igor Oistrakh.

Goldstein's daughter, the pianist Julia Goldstein, who sat on the competition's committee of honor, says she was struck by Semenenko's ability to carry forth this schooling while also integrating a contemporary, highly personal sensibility. "I find it fascinating that at his young age, he has such a distinctive sound. It reminds me of past times. The sound has a certain intensity – something absolute, something out of this world. There are not many violinists who are able to create a bridge between the past and present." Semenenko began playing his instrument at age six and looks back with gratitude that he fell directly into the hands of Zoya Mertsalova – also the teacher of Yuri Bashmet – with whom he studied for 11 years at the Stolyarsky School. "She always said that balance is the most important thing for a good musician," he recalls. "Intelligence and humility are particularly strong values. One has to have sovereignty and confidence and trust in oneself onstage, but not be cheeky or show off: One has to enjoy oneself, but always in the right proportion."

Page 1 of 2



Aleksey Semenenko, *violinist*

musicalamerica
WORLDWIDE

Rebecca Schmid | *MusicalAmerica.com* | March 1, 2015

It took time to cultivate this balance, however. In the early years, pressure came largely from his father, a clarinetist in the Odessa Symphony Orchestra. "I didn't dream of playing the violin [professionally], or practicing most of all," Semenenko recalls. "He had me under his control. He always took me to rehearsal."

At only 15, however, Semenenko was suddenly forced to stand on his own when his father fell ill and passed away. "It was very sad, but it carried me further at that time," he says. "I had to decide that I wanted to become musically independent because I was no longer under his eye."

Although the word never escapes Semenenko's lips, his development up until then counts as prodigious. At age seven, after winning the local children's festival *Starlet*, he made his first appearance with orchestra, performing Vivaldi's Violin Concerto in A minor with the Odessa Philharmonic.

He made such an impression that, three years later, conductor Hobart Earle invited him to tag along with the orchestra on a U.S. tour. Upon playing in a Russian restaurant in New York accompanied by quartet (which included his godfather on clarinet), Semenenko met someone who would become a friend and patron: Ed Wilson, a sports equipment heir who immediately insisted on buying him a bigger and better violin.

Semenenko currently plays an 18th century Carlo Ferdinando Landolfi instrument on loan from the German foundation *Musikleben* as well as his own Bernardel, which Wilson acquired for him at a London auction. Since winning first prize in the Young Concert Artists International Auditions in 2012, he has returned regularly to the U.S., performing in venues such as Merkin Hall and the Kennedy Center to enthusiastic reviews from the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*. He returns on tour next fall.

"It is like a fairy tale," says Semenenko. "Then when one wakes up when one is back to reality."

Thanks to the Boris Goldstein Competition, he is also scheduled to appear at the Festival Musical Olympus in St. Petersburg in June. Meanwhile, he will continue to reside in Cologne, where he is enrolled at the local University of Music as a student of Bron, and pursue masterclasses with his teacher in Interlaken, Switzerland.

While he remains strongly connected to Odessa and its rich artistic culture, he feels obliged to follow the opportunities where they are. "We only live once," he says. "I don't see why I should sacrifice my life, although some people wouldn't agree. I don't know what it will be like for the next generation. All the good teachers and students are emigrating, but that is understandable."

In May, Semenenko will participate in the Queen Elisabeth Competition, where Boris Goldstein famously took a prize at age of 14. Although he finds it difficult to calm his nerves in the throes of such an event, he is in his element once onstage.

"One feels the connection to the audience, this channel of energy, and then it is worth it," he says. "After the performance, if it went well, one feels as if in heaven."



Aleksey Semenenko, *violinist*

The New York Times

Romantic Intensity, Replete With Trills and Flourishes

Aleksey Semenenko, Young Concert Artists Winner, at Merkin Hall

Vivien Schweitzer | The New York Times | February 6, 2014

Even by the reliably high standards of the Young Concert Artists series, which has been promoting gifted young musicians since 1961, the performance on Tuesday evening at Merkin Concert Hall by the Ukrainian violinist Aleksey Semenenko proved particularly rewarding.

Mr. Semenenko chose works that highlighted his strengths; a powerful technique, rich tone and passionate approach. There was a fluidity and warmth to his playing throughout the program, which concluded with a joyous, bravura performance of Paganini's showpiece "I Palpiti."



Aleksey Semenenko and the pianist Inna Firsova at Merkin Hall on Tuesday night

(Ian Douglas/The New York Times)

Inspired by an aria from Rossini's "Tancredi," the work incorporates harmonics and other virtuosic flourishes, which Mr. Semenenko deftly navigated. Inna Firsova, his excellent pianist, provided nuanced and expressive support in the program, beginning with Beethoven's Sonata No. 4 in A minor, one of his less frequently performed sonatas.

While he played the Beethoven well, Mr. Semenenko sounded more in his element in the ensuing repertoire, including Chausson's "Poème," a vehicle for his sweet, rich tone and sultry trills. He brought a burnished sound and intensity to Ysaÿe's Sonata for Solo Violin No. 3 "Ballade," written — like all his violin sonatas — for a close musician friend.

The duo's characterful interpretation of Debussy's Sonata in G minor also proved effective as they ably illuminated its impressionistic effects, pizzicati, metric ambiguities and introspective moods. Describing the Iberian-flavored finale of the work, which he composed during World War I, Debussy wrote that "it ultimately leaves the impression of an idea turning back on itself, like a snake biting its own tail."

Mr. Semenenko also offered two Tchaikovsky works, including a graceful rendition of the Valse-Scherzo (Op. 34). For the first encore, he played Tchaikovsky's "Mélodie." After an evening of demonstrating his prowess in Romantic showpieces, he concluded with a soulful rendition of the Largo from Bach's Sonata for Unaccompanied Violin No. 3 in C Major (BWV 1005).



Aleksey Semenenko, *violinist*

The Washington Post

Violinist Aleksey Semenenko debuts at Kennedy Center

Robert Battey | The Washington Post | January 29, 2014

By happenstance, I was sent to review two talented young violinists making their Washington debuts two days apart at the Kennedy Center Terrace Theater, both having won a brace of international competitions. On Tuesday, it was 24-year-old Aleksey Semenenko, presented by the Young Concert Artists of Washington.

Semenenko's strengths include a spectacularly efficient bow-arm and musical ideas that are detailed, logical and sometimes appealingly impetuous. In Ysaye's "Ballade," his architecture was masterful, as he took his time to set off and build up each episode. He got slightly carried away on the last page, but this was still fine music-making. In the Beethoven A minor sonata, his wide variety of articulations explored every corner of the composer's imagination. Paganini's "I Palpiti" is one of the scariest tightrope walks in the literature, and that Semenenko got more than 90 percent of the artificial harmonics was a true triumph.

The Achilles' heel here was in the tone production. Semenenko's vibrato — done solely from his wrist — is tight and metallic. In the Debussy Sonata, his pianist, Inna Firsova, provided more contrast and variety. And in Chausson's "Poème, and Kreisler's "Caprice Viennois," the many colors in the music all came out the same; the sound was focused but never took wing.

Decades ago, young string players were taught to listen to Heifetz, Oistrakh, Rostropovich, Fournier and to great singers; this was the cultural soil in which they developed. Today, this soil is also infused with the dry, citric sounds of baroque and early-classical groups as well as non-classical genres. Young artists now pick and choose from among these influences and also pick and choose whether and when they're going to sculpt musically logical, singing phrases. Beauty of sound is only one expressive ingredient among many, and this relative neglect is writ large in too many otherwise remarkable talents now. Semenenko has a boatload of technique, but will need to re-examine his basic sound if he is to become a viable solo artist.





Aleksey Semenenko, *violinist*

The Boston Musical Intelligencer

a virtual journal and blog of the classical music scene in Boston

Stars from Odessa

Lawrence Franko

The Boston Musical Intelligencer

March 14, 2011

Alexei Semenenko and Artem Belogurov were schoolmates in Odessa at the Stolyarsky Special Music School, perhaps the very cradle of Odessa violinists (and more recently, pianists). Clearly, Odessa produces some marvelous pianists, as well as world-class violinists. Indeed, one of the joys of the evening was the stunning partnership between our two young musicians: their voicing and exchange of contrasting main and subordinate lines was quite special.

First on the program was the famous Chaconne from Bach's D-minor Partita. It would be daring enough for a violinist to end a program with the Chaconne, but to begin with it? The Chaconne is a solemn, serious dance, but a dance nevertheless, and most definitely not the academic treatise it often becomes in the hands of so many violinists. Semenenko made the Chaconne dance. Then followed the first and 17th Paganini Caprices for solo violin (Op. 1), amazing pieces played with stunning, accurate technique and intonation by Semenenko, but also with beautiful phrasing.

Next up, Tchaikovsky, a moving and passionate performance of the "Meditation" from *Un Souvenir d'un lieu cher* (Op. 42), a warm, melodious work originally planned to be the slow movement of Tchaikovsky's violin concerto. This was followed by his *Valse-scherzo*, Op. 34. That one really made us want to dance! Concluding the first half of the concert, was another Paganini work: "La Campanella" ("the little bell"), the last movement of Paganini's *Violin Concerto No. 2*, one of the most delightful rondos in the literature. Semenenko and Belogurov played it with verve, wit, and delicatessen... not to mention the Semenenko's spectacular left-hand pizzicato work.

The concert resumed with music by Schemmer, first with his 1990 *Toney Tango*, a brilliant, dramatic work. In this violin and piano version, it was a great showpiece for Alexey's technique, sense of dance rhythm, and skill in making dramatic, abrupt, changes in moods. Then the reverie was broken, as the duo thrust us into Richard Strauss's *Sonata for Violin and Piano in E-flat*, Op. 18, the sonata world's equivalent of a musical tsunami.

Semenenko and Belogurov were the perfect match for Strauss's tour de force, whose emotional range had to have broken new bounds at the time, going from the very heights of ecstatic elation to the most delicate tenderness, and back. Not only was their technique and power up to the task, but their sensitivity to the different voices, moods, and characters in the drama, and the suspension of time in phrasing, clarified what could easily have been but sound and fury in lesser hands. Is it coincidence that our two performers are also almost exactly the same age as was Strauss when he wrote this work? Who better to express youthful, passion, than these two so well matched artists?

Perhaps the highest compliment I can pay is that they gave me, an unabashed lover of Strauss's later works, an appreciation for this sonata I simply did not have before, either as a listener or violinist. The work simply doesn't compress into the bytes and bits of even the best recordings; its scale and its vast pallet of moods demand a live performance, in much the same way that photos of a Hagia Sophia or Petra are but pale reflections of the real site. Semenenko and Belogurov's powerful, clear interpretation brought that musical reality to life.

I hope, and trust that we will hear much more from these fine young artists in the future.