



Pianist Tomer Gewirtzman (photo credit: Rachel Papo)

Concert Review: Pianist Tomer Gewirtzman (NYC, 30 November 2018)

Jon Sobel

The young Israeli pianist and Juilliard graduate **Tomer Gewirtzman** recently added to his trophy shelf the seventh annual Leo B. Ruiz Memorial Recital Award. That honor led to a concert at **Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall** that showed why he has received so many plaudits. A buzzing crowd of musicians, family, and fans enjoyed a glowing performance of a challenging program of Beethoven, Brahms, and three very different Russian composers, plus a Chopin nocturne for an encore.

Dmitri Shostakovich's music often has a searching quality, like a quest for meaning. It's true in the piano music as much as in the **symphonies**. The concert opened with the Prelude and Fugue in D Minor. **The Prelude was a fine demonstration of the tonal clarity and depth Gewirtzman drew from the Steinway throughout**, with distinct delineation of melody and accompaniment.

The gorgeous Fugue felt warm, with gentle builds and rebuilds. As its airy second theme grew more agitated the colors grew brighter. **One felt the pianist's awareness that as the music searches for meaning it creates its own as it goes along**, right through to the incendiary conclusion.

Beethoven's "Andante Favori" in F Major came across well, negotiated with deliberation as the variations grew more complex. Right hand/left hand interplay was especially nice here, the moving bass lines well marked.

A knowing momentum drove Nikolai Medtner's Fairy Tale, Op. 51 No. 3 with its playfully skipping tempo and cloudy interludes. Gewirtzman then remained in Russia but shifted modes radically with Alexander Scriabin's Sonata No. 2, an early work that partakes strongly of the Romantic tradition. Chopin's influence seemed evident in the Andante, with the merest hints of the eccentric composer's later experimentation. The pianist made much of the dynamic contrasts, evoking the moonlight glinting off the waves in the middle section, and sea spray in the fluttering right-hand passages at the end.

Rolling effects in the Presto, reminiscent again of some of Chopin's music, built into wriggling walls of sound. The composer described it as "stormy agitation." But Gewirtzman also brought out the music's good-natured aspects. Equally strong were his interpretations of three of Scriabin's Op. 65 Études, full of spectral calisthenics, ghostly drifts, and frantic assertiveness.

The second half of the program was devoted to Brahms' Sonata No. 3 in F Minor. The pianist brought a refreshing delicacy to the Allegro maestoso opening movement. Well measuring his dynamics and colors, he made the piece a full dramatic journey, without extraneous theatrics. One got the sense he was living the music.

Likewise the achingly beautiful second movement. It's full of the harmonic shifts, the unexpected but then inevitable-seeming melodic twists, that make Brahms unique. Gewirtzman displayed a fine grasp of what made the composer so enormously imaginative. The eruption of passion near the end of the movement was a smashing statement.

The Scherzo had a sense of playful rhythm, while ultimately proving a serious game indeed. A striking performance of the ruminative Intermezzo with its echoes of Beethoven's Fifth led into a sensitive reading of the finale's coruscating textures and eccentric rhythms. Altogether this worthy rendition of the Sonata was both reverent and youthfully energetic. It even shone light into a few corners that felt new to me.

In an encore, he took a light, songlike approach to a Chopin Nocturne, flaring into what felt like just the right level of passion. Tomer Gewirtzman has accomplished much in his short career to date, but on the evidence of this fine concert, a great deal more is likely in store.