



## Aleksey Semenenko, *violinist*

### The Boston Musical Intelligencer

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

#### Stars from Odessa

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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.