



Andrew Tyson, *pianist*

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A Rare Poetry at the Piano

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A. Tyson (photo from the *New York Times*)

Having missed Andrew Tyson's previous New York performance, which gathered a positive response in the press and enthusiasm among piano cognoscenti, I made a point of attending his next concert which took place less than a month later. Though his name was known to me for quite some time, other than hearing some performances on Youtube, my only experience with his live playing was just once, when I heard his exciting, spectacular version of the Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No. 2 performed at a YCA Gala at Alice Tully Hall. His recital at Merkin Hall on Tuesday was his first solo recital and right out front I might say that it was a revelatory experience.

Tyson's program, unlike the one presented on Dec. 13th, was geared toward a different audience (2PM is also a time that attracts seniors rather than college age patrons) and was more traditional. He opened with the charming Sonata in A-major by Schubert and followed it with a group of Chopin works. He then devoted the second half of the program to much more virtuosic material: Book 1 of the Albéniz Iberia Suite, and then another piece inspired by Spanish motifs: Liszt's Spanish Rhapsody.

The Schubert was simple, charming, and exquisite. It sang beautifully in the first two movements and then sparkled in the final Allegro. In its gentle, optimistic mode the piece to spark with Rossinian straightforwardness and for that reason remains one of

the most popular of this composer Piano Sonatas.

In the Chopin group, my ears perked up to a style of playing more like old masters than typical competition winners. The Nocturne in E had an operatic and narrative quality reminding me of the legendary Shura Cherkassky. The Mazurka in C-sharp minor showed Tyson's rich imagination. Among musical genres, the Mazurka is the most difficult to capture in all of Chopin; Vladimir Horowitz famously declared that each of the Mazurkas, especially the big one performed by our pianist, resembles a little poem. There was no doubt in my mind that Tyson was telling us a story that had more than one character and more than one mood. The bell-like notes in the coda were astounding. The Ballade in F, like the previous works, was both capricious and stormy but very convincing as well. This young pianist has an ability to bring out a melody line or inner voice as if out of nowhere, bending the flow of music and suspending it when necessary. As the great orator who knows when to use his full voice and when to resort to a whisper or a murmur, in a similar manner Tyson lets the piano sometimes just hum, and when he brings up the fuller volume he creates even more pronounced dynamic contrast. Throughout the afternoon his playing was a display of natural, idiomatic, eloquent phrasing, a lovely, crystalline tone with a ringing quality where there was not even a moment of harshness in the most forceful passages. All in all not a small accomplishment.



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Equally convincing, perhaps even more so, were the first three episodes that constitute Book 1 of Iberia. This suite of twelve scenes is considered by many as one of the pinnacles of the piano repertory not only for the tone painting but for its fabled pianistic difficulty. The cycle was adored by such composers as Debussy, who was influenced by the work and whose own music evokes Spain, and by Oliver Messiaen, who called it "the greatest wonder of the piano, the masterpiece of Spanish music which takes its place-and perhaps the highest - among the stars of first magnitude of the king of instruments". Those difficulties were not apparent in Tyson's performance.

"Evocation", which opens the first of the four books depicting scenes of Andalusia, is the most haunting piece: wistful, pensive, mysterious and colored with pastels. "The Port" is a picture of the harbor of Santa Maria, near Cádiz, and illustrates activity by the sea, fishermen, boats. And all the light and colors, and the morning sunlight, were present under Tyson's fingers. The longest and most difficult episode, "The Corpus Christi in Seville", is in the words of pianist Pedro Carboné a vivid picture of a "processional bearing the statue of the virgin through narrow streets with a marching band (including out-of-tune notes), singers, penitents. Albéniz here solemnly invokes a popular Castilian song, La Tarara - odd, because in Spain La Tarara is considered neither solemn nor Andalusian. This is the most programmatic piece in the collection. You can hear the drums at the beginning (Albéniz used to place his hands on his belly between the first chords to add dramatic effect). When "La Tarara" ascends high in the treble, Albéniz adds a saeta - a spontaneous religious outcry, typical of such celebrations - in left hand octaves. Eventually the festivities subside and night falls "with distant bells". How to translate it into simple English? Probably as "fiendishly difficult with a need for four hands and 25 fingers".

The recital concluded with an equally stunning performance of the Liszt Spanish Rhapsody, a composition in which the composer first uses an ancient Spanish tune, La Folia, as the theme for variations, then introduces another one jota which he also elaborates until one great culmination. Tyson's effortless virtuosity and elegance created a stunning effect and created a rousing finale to a memorable recital by a young pianist who displayed rare poetic and athletic qualities and who for me first and foremost remains nonetheless a wonderful musician.

There was only one encore: Scarlatti's well-known Sonata in D minor, which under Tyson's fingers received a charming if highly romanticized reading.

Obviously a long list which illustrates Tyson's already huge accomplishments, such as winning competitions, playing all over the world or being awarded an Avery Fisher Career Grant, seems to be proof that his talent has been discovered not only by this reviewer. Well, another name of a young musician to keep in mind and remember well.