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Alexandre Moutouzkine, ending-up in a fairy tale



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Alexandre Moutouzkine leans slightly towards the piano, with great respect, the way one ask a girl to dance, as if to ask permission before laying hands on. The pianist never imposes himself upon you but simply lets you enjoy the music. He opens a whole parallel world made of feelings and poetry where the soul speaks to the soul instead of the hand to the ear. He makes the most of what his instrument has to offer, without ever sounding like he's playing the piano.

Born into a family of musicians, Alexandre Moutouzkine says he had no choice regarding his career. However, he can't deny he loves being a pianist. At the age of 15, he won a major competition in Ukraine where the renowned Soviet pianist Vladimir Krainev noticed him. The young boy was invited to study at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hannover under Krainev's guidance. Those were years during which he learned, accumulated knowledge, and built-up his character. When he was 21, Moutouzkine met Solomon Mikowsky. Mikowsky liked him so much that he asked him to come study at Manhattan School of Music in New York. At the time, the young pianist was extremely poor and Mr. Mikowsky sent airline tickets and money for the taxi. The United-States became the turning point in his career.

Last September, Moutouzkine was appointed piano teacher at the prestigious Manhattan School of Music. He admits he never thought he would teach. In fact, the pianist has a successful concert career – sometimes playing up to 11 different programs for 21 concerts in 30 days. Everything began three years ago when Mikowsky asked him to be his assistant and to work with one student in particular to prepare for upcoming events. The student did really well and everybody noticed.

Moutouzkine says he loves his profession. He is an avid musician: every composer is great and everything coming next becomes his main purpose, the center of his attention. He enjoys going to a different universe every time he opens a score. "It's like whatever is happening around, when you go home and start playing, you become a completely different person, with a different perspective on everything. It's like a different life." Music can change life. "Ideally you are like a doctor, in a way you change people's lives", believes the pianist. When he was 20 years old he played at the Cliburn Competition. Although he won a Jury Discretionary Award he didn't go on to the finals. Nevertheless, a few days after the competition he got a letter from a Federal Prison. Apparently the competition was broadcast on the radio and a female prisoner had listened. The woman was so touched by the young man's playing, she wrote him saying that she had been in prison almost as long as he had been alive and how much his playing meant to her. "Music can do that, making life more beautiful", smiles the pianist.

Because he had judged a concerto competition the morning before our meeting, we discussed competitions and musicianship. "When I first listen to a musician I am seeking for a solid balance of qualities and mastery. Every musician should be like a building: there are so many elements involved and those have to come together." According to the pianist, the soul, the personality, the music that emanates from inside comes first. Then come the emotions balanced and controlled by the intellect. Obviously, technique, understanding of style, attention to the beauty of sound, and the correctness of the phrasing are inseparable factors of good music making. "When you listen to a competition, each time you hear a combination of many qualities in each performer", says Moutouzkine. "From my understanding, in a competition, you are supposed to judge and reward the work which the person does with her talent. Otherwise in general I want to hear someone who makes me feel something: a sort of vibration, this energy coming from the person that takes you and doesn't leave you." Also honesty and humility are always nice to perceive in a performer: whatever you are doing should speak for you, you shouldn't go bragging about it.

There is no explanation of how one puts one's soul into music. Moutouzkine draws a parallel with love. "If you try to follow a recipe, a formula, you will miss the point: unless it's supported with your own emotions and intake it means nothing." The young man always tries to create atmospheres, to create what he calls a reality that is surreal. Music is incredibly emotional; listeners should experience something more than just notes. The young man believes that if you really want something, it will be expressed in the sound. He believes that if it's part of you, it's possible to go mentally toward a certain sound and make your instrument sound like something else. You have to enter this world of music with your thoughts; you have to think about it. Sounds don't exist on a physical level, but on a level of waves. With your energy you can change those waves and go everywhere you want. "You play one or two or three phrases, you followed the way of emotions, there is intensity in the air, suddenly you switch to a metaphysical level and you end-up in a fairy tale." So very often inspiration just comes from the moment, the music itself, it grabs you. "I get incredibly mad when people are playing and sound indifferent. Music is almost like a little baby. The moment the music starts, it's like the baby is crying. How can you not have the heart to take him in your arms and care for him? It's the same with music: the moment it starts to sound, you have to go with it and go for it."

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Beautifully said.

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