

Pianist Alexandre Moutouzkine – modernist Cuban idiom and Russian virtuosity in New York



Kendra Jones photography

Currently featured in no less than seven all-Rachmaninoff piano recitals at the renowned Carnegie Series at the Nyack library, three of them still to be heard, Russian-American pianist, Alexandre Moutouzkine, does not fail to impress with his crystal clear melodic sense of line, sensitive expressiveness, and powerful

pianistic facility.

This week at [Merkin Hall](#), Moutouzkine gave a sampler of his take on Rachmaninoff in the first half of his recital, exploring the romantic resonance of the Russian master's preludes, awesomely engaging his listeners, filling every corner of the hall. Moutouzkine followed up with contemporary fare, and concluded the mid-day recital with his own transcription of Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite*.

The performer's humorous, yet unpretentious accompanying remarks aided in connecting the performer with his audience, and made it fun to follow the lines of new repertoire. His banter was especially effective in introducing several compositions by living Cuban composers. He shared from the stage: "My revered teacher, Solomon Mikowsky, who, born in Cuba (of Russian-Polish descent) always said to me: 'to get that special Cuban feel and rhythm – you have to have it in your blood.' but nevertheless, I hope that through all the lessons, all the screaming...perhaps one drop of that blood of my mentor has entered my bloodstream, or at least my visceral system."





With Pianist Alexandre Moutouzkine

Top Prize Winner: Cleveland, Naumburg, Artur Rubinstein International Piano Competitions



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<p>May 3, Saturday, 7:30 pm PIANO SYMPHONIQUE Sonata No.1 in D minor, Op.28 Thirteen Preludes, Op.32</p>	<p>May 17, Saturday, 7:30 pm THE BELLS OF MOSCOW Nine Etudes-Tableaux, Op.33 Sonata No.2 in B-flat minor, Op.36</p>

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Photo

Credit: Ellen Appel

The pianist made a convincing case for that drop of blood running in his veins, and for the Cuban pieces by composers Leo Brouwer, Guido Lopez-Gavilan, and Ernan Lopez-Nussa, which held those sensuous rhythmic idioms and jazzy lilt typically associated with the musical language of the region, despite their contemporary, mostly abstract, configurations.

In 1995, Moutouzkine had left his native Russia for Hannover's reputable Hochschule für Musik (Theater und Medien) until it, according to the artist, "somehow happened" that Mikowsky heard him perform and secured a place for him as his pupil at Manhattan School of Music, in 2001: "It was a new world for me, and it opened doors for me [that] I would not have otherwise known existed," says Moutouzkine. "I did not have money for a flight to New York, nor for a taxi ride for that matter; he invited me, and it clearly was the step that changed my life. Always, when you get to a new place, everything filters into your playing, new ideas [and] new energy always translate musically, and I grew all along during these formative years. But out of all the influences I received, he most definitely was the most transforming one."

Of Mikowsky, Moutouzkine says, “he was also always brutally honest. No small talk, no flattery, and no coaxing. But at the end he always came through for me,” the artist describes. “When I had just arrived, minutes before auditioning for the scholarship I so depended on, Mikowsky just took me aside, saying, “don’t worry, you probably won’t get it, but you may as well play...” And he held on, rather stubbornly, to all of his opinions.

“He also was the one who revealed the ingredients of Cuban music to me. South American music had never been part of my vocabulary before, something ethereal, with incredible traditions and sonorities,” he says, and “for introducing me to that world [alone], I have to be eternally thankful. There is this special knowledge of how to treat ‘time’... one of the big secrets in music.”



Photo Credit: Ellen Apple

Sometimes personal accomplishments counted more for Mikowsky than competition laurels, even if it was hard to pinpoint an attitude of praise: “At one point, I was introduced to the legendary Alicia de la Rocha, who I had never heard about before; that certainly put me on a new path and a new program, which brought me to the Zaragoza competition as a young pianist, and then the Van Cliburn in 2001. While I only got a discretionary award, my performance had been broadcasted on the radio, and I received a letter from a woman in federal prison thanking me for my touching performance. Showing him the letter, upon my arrival, he said: ‘Alex, now I am really happy for you, and can see a bright future for you playing in all the jails throughout the United States.’”

Photo Credit: Van Cliburn International



Piano Competition

Moutouzkine has certainly inherited his mentor's somewhat restricted and unforgiving stance on collective success, accomplishment, and praise, seeing it as something standing in the way of the never-ending search for the fulfillment of artistic promises: "As a performer you don't ever really feel accomplished, it would be counterproductive to the whole process, the continuum of being creative. New York certainly is the right place to be inspired with so much to offer, you just need the energy to fully take advantage," he says.

Moutouzkine himself is a bit weary of the general direction of self-promotion used these days by young performers who feel pressured to get creative on social media platforms in order to further their reputations, given the lack of performance opportunities for them at established institutions.

In 2013, Moutouzkine joined the faculty of his Alma Mater, the Manhattan School of Music, and says, "I always tell my students that this whole way of getting superficial attention does take a lot of time and energy, which might be better spent where it really counts – with the music. Ok," he admits, "there should be a good balance. You don't have to not announce your events on your facebook page...but ultimately, if you concentrate on getting the real work done, other things will fall in place."





Photo Credit: Yi-

Fang Wu

Moutouzkine himself has been taken on by different management during different areas of his emerging performance career, including Astral Artists, whose 2012/13 season he opened with a very original concert that included a specially commissioned animation entitled *Who Stole*

the Mona Lisa, accompanied live by Moutouzkine performing his own transcription of Stravinsky's *Firebird*. The performance was repeated in its entirety at Philadelphia's Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts.

Perhaps this example best illustrates that while self-proclaimed talent on facebook may not count as press or facilitate artists' recognition, participation in audience-friendly artistic projects may definitely contribute to an artist's career advancement – if, as Moutouzkine says, “there is substance to build on.”

Moutouzkine's greatness lies in the elusive product of personality, technical knowhow, and the artistic transparency of his expressivity – and this quality isn't something you can necessarily achieve through practice. “It is that level of greatness that is intoxicating, connecting with great art and with the meaning behind it all...rarely achieved, but always strived for. It is that energy, which comes from the music itself, these sounds that embody a message...as a performer you are in the ocean, with the movement of the music, and when the wave rises – and you catch it – it raises you – and your audience. It's magic, and all about that energy that is in the sound, just like ultrasound has the power to heal; music can change everything on a molecular level. But on stage you are in the moment, you can never play the same exact way again, but you have that energy and what you do with it – like in real life – is up to you in that instant.”

In the spirit of shared passion for bringing classical music to alternative venues and in his support of GetClassical's efforts to reach new audiences, Moutouzkine will perform at GetClassical's new series at Zinc Bar on January 15th, 2015.

More info on that to come on <http://getclassical.org>

One Response to “Pianist Alexandre Moutouzkine – modernist Cuban idiom and Russian virtuosity in New York”

1. I especially find appropriate and so true the words, “Moutouzkine's greatness lies in the elusive

product of personality, technical knowhow, and the artistic transparency of his expressivity”. Knowing him as I do , having heard him in many different venues, it is truly these characteristics that break all barriers between composer, performer and audience. His banter, at once friendly and informative, has become one of his endearing trademarks. We haev been fortunate to present him to so many diverse audiences.

[Bonnie Slobodien](#) said this on [October 19th, 2014 at 5:34 PM](#)

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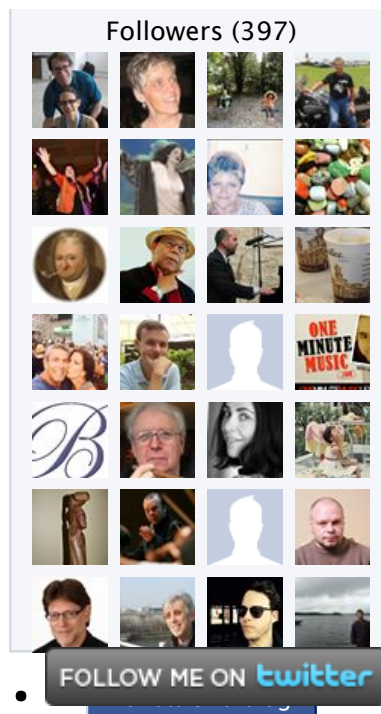
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