

## JACK LONDON PARK PIANO CLUB

REVIEW of CONCERT, February 22, 2015

Departing from the usual eclectic mix of piano music, the JLP Piano Club performed a sold-out concert focused on the ultimate composer of piano music – Frédéric Chopin. Prior to the music, there was a rotating slide show of pictures of Chopin and biographical facts. JLP Piano Club member Nancy Watson-Tansey took the audience on a brief tour of Chopin's life, providing the biographical and historical context, as well as the extent of his lasting influence as an extraordinary piano virtuoso and his unparalleled body of compositions for the piano.

JLP Piano Club leader Jud Goodrich began with a selection of popular songs from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that took their tunes and inspiration from Chopin compositions, including *Gypsy Love Song*, roughly based on *Piano Concerto No. 1*, Op. 11 in E minor. In addition, he played variations on *Etude* (Op. 10, No. 3 in E major), the *Theme from Ballade* (Op. 23, No. 1 in G minor), and *Prelude* (Op. 28, No. 7 in A major). The "romantic" nature of Chopin's music was clearly expressed in songs of a bygone era.

John Dinwiddie played a selection of five different pieces – *Mazurka* (Op. 50 No. 3 in F sharp minor), a light piece in a somewhat modernistic style, and three *Preludes* from Opus 28. They were No. 12 in G sharp minor; No. 15 in D flat major ("Raindrop", evoking the sound of raindrops and then a storm); and No. 24 in D minor ("Storm"). Ending with the 1846 *Nocturne* (Op. 62, No. 1 in B major), the pieces ably spanned Chopin's career from the earlier works to several years before his untimely death at age 39.

Jack Power again impressed us with his playing of pieces by memory. The first was *Trois Nouvelles Etudes No. 1 in F minor*, an exercise from a book for Chopin's students and employing different rhythms in each hand (3/4 time in the left hand and 4/4 time in the right). He also played a posthumous work, the lush, expressive *Nocturne* (labeled Op. 72, No. 1 in E minor), composed when Chopin was only 17.

One of the Piano Club's most accomplished players, Zinaida Milyavsky, a professional pianist who came from Russia 18 years ago, played three lovely *Etudes*, in her confident, versatile style. After hearing her play Mozart and Tchaikovsky, among others, it was a treat to hear her play Chopin. The first piece, the so-called *Black Key Etude* (Op. 10, No. 5 in G flat major) was composed when Chopin was only twenty. The second, No. 6, had a melancholy feel, restrained but with much depth of feeling. In No. 7, she showed off the virtuosity required by Chopin's music, with both tenderness and power, receiving a standing ovation.

Rubina Mazurka, a lovely young woman with a perfect name for performing Chopin, delighted us with both her piano playing and her singing. First, she showed her mastery of a signature, familiar piece, *Polonaise* (Op. 40, No. 2 in C minor), written in 1838 and commonly thought of as a funeral march. Renowned pianist Artur

Rubinstein described the piece as “an example of Polish tragedy,” with its exciting contrasts in both volume and mood. She then sang two of the only 19 songs written by Chopin, only two of which were published during his lifetime, and most of which were based on Chopin’s own poems. She was ably accompanied by JLP Piano Club member and perennial favorite, Esfir Ross, in performing *Der Frühling* (Op. 74, No. 2, “Spring”) and *Une Melodie* (Op. 74 No. 9), with skill and depth of expression. Esfir laughingly said that Rubina was introducing us to “obscure Chopin music.”

The same two performers then treated us to Chopin’s *Variation in D major for Four Hands*, inspired by a Thomas More poem and composed at age 16. Chopin gave the piece to a Polish statesman, but it was lost until 1854, when his sister discovered several pages (the first and last being missing) and had the piece reconstructed. The famed composer and pianist Paganini, to whom Chopin had dedicated the lovely *Souvenir for Paganini*, used the theme for his *Carnival of Venice*. Rubina and Esfir received an enthusiastic standing ovation.

Esfir Ross, a JLP piano club member for 4 or 5 years and a native of Moldova who came to the U.S. in 1980s, rounded out the concert in her inimitable style. She recounted playing recitals in Israel, Germany, Italy, France, Argentina, as well as performing at the Chopin Festival in Warsaw. She played the *Nocturne* (Op. 18 No. 1 in A flat minor) by Adolf Gutmann, a Chopin student who played in salons in the style of Chopin and was devoted to Chopin “to his last breath.” She also played the *Ballade* (Op. 23 No. 1 in G minor) by Chopin, a very famous and popular piece in Chopin’s day, embodying Chopin at his most energetic. After another standing ovation, Esfir played a “Waltz” discovered in the 1950’s and said to be a “dubious” Chopin piece, although it was, as Esfir said, very beautiful.

The next concert featuring the talented players (and vocalists) of the Piano Club will be held on Sunday, May 10, at 2 pm. **As always, all proceeds from the concerts benefit Jack London Park.**