

The Washington Post



RHAPSODY IN RUSSIAN: Angel Gil-Ordóñez directs the Post-Classical Ensemble. (Tom Wolff)

Music review: the Post-Classical Ensemble's 'Russian Gershwin' evening

Monday, September 27, 2010; C06

It's easy to see why the [Post-Classical Ensemble](#) would embrace George Gershwin. This most American of composers has long been underappreciated at home, relegated to pops concerts for the sin of having drawn on jazz and popular music. But Gershwin is overdue for a fresh look, and that's the ensemble's specialty: turning familiar music on its head, providing context and fresh perspectives and generally pulling the rug out from under listeners.

That was the strategy behind "The Russian Gershwin," the program on Friday night at the Clarice Smith Center. Russia, it turns out, has long been crazy for Gershwin and has taken him far more seriously than America has, and the group brought two gifted young Russian pianists to show us why.

But make no mistake: This was not some weird, exiled Gershwin smelling of vodka and revolution. On the contrary: Pianist Genadi Zagor opened the evening with an introspective and elegant improvisation on Gershwin's Prelude No. 2, then seamlessly slid into an ultra-sophisticated and altogether gorgeous account of the concerto-like

"Rhapsody in Blue." Zagor is a superb pianist who provided his own imaginative, very personal improvisations for the solo piano parts, walking the fine line between jazz and classical with perfect balance.

Vakhtang Kodanashvili took a jazzier and more extroverted approach to the Piano Concerto in F, a too rarely heard wonder from 1926. Kodanashvili's lean, exuberant playing contrasted nicely with Zagor's more lush approach, and -- backed by razor-sharp playing from the ensemble, led by Music Director Angel Gil-Ordóñez -- resulted in a terrifically exciting account.

An edge-of-the-seat "Cuban Overture" brought the program to a close. Was it a distinctly "Russian" evening? Maybe -- but in the end it didn't matter: Gershwin was Gershwin, in any language.

-- **Stephen Brookes**