



Vinocour dazzles at two concerts

TWO concerts last week featured the same visiting artist, award-winning Russian pianist, Lev Vinocour.

On Tuesday evening, for the Friends of Music recital at the Durban Jewish Club, he presented a programme of music by Schumann, as well as various musical paraphrases by turn-of-the-century piano virtuoso composers. At the NPO Symphony concert on Thursday he played Liszt's *Piano Concerto No 1*.

Described as a sensational performer, Vinocour's recital programme on Tuesday seemed set to confirm his reputation as a keyboard wizard, with the inclusion of no less than four music paraphrases, three of music by Johann Strauss, the fourth Prokofiev's arrangement of *Sheherazade* by Rimsky-Korsakov.

These works, intended for display of technical mastery, offered, seemingly, no real challenge for Vinocour, for he had total command of the keyboard, with astonishing articulation and a wide range of pianistic sonorities and dynamics at his finger-tips – dazzling indeed.

Fortunately, he is also a remarkably fine musician with a highly sensitive feeling for musical line and direction, and excellent musical characterisation. Nevertheless, a single dazzle-piece would have sufficed for an evening's recital, and my choice would have been Prokofiev's *Sheherazade concert fantasy*, performed with precision by Vinocour.

The Schumann works, *Arabesque* and the technically demanding *Etudes Symphoniques*, were both captivating in some ways, idiosyncratic in other ways and, if not entirely orthodox, Vinocour's performance certainly held one's fascination.

His performance of the Liszt *Piano Concerto No 2* at the Symphony concert on Thursday, however, left one in no doubt that he is one of the finest



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young piano virtuosi of our time. With his prodigious technique and superb musical characterisation, as well as a sense of exhilarating pleasure in his own performance, Vinocour delighted the audience with a performance that was utterly splendid, exciting and dynamic, and with some movingly beautiful playing in the slow, softer sections (unfortunately marred at the most breathtaking moment by an annoying cell-phone ring).

This superb performance was shared with a top-form NPO projecting, overall, a totally satisfying experience, as was the exquisitely played encore, *Traumerei* by Schumann.

The NPO under Sidney Harth's direction set the tone of excellence from the start with a fine account of Verdi's *The Sicilian Vespers*.

The final work on the programme, *Symphony No 5* by Prokofiev, is intensely contemporary music for its time, in spirit, form and colour, with large sweeping lyricism, powerful rhythmic momentum and harmonic sonorities, and vibrant orchestral colours.

This monumental work needs several hearings to fully grasp its varying moods, although one can pick up some familiar Prokofiev along the way.

Harth and the extended NPO gave a remarkably good rendering of this powerful work.

This week's NPO concert features another award-winning soloist, 21-year-old American viola player Nokuthula Ngwenyama, who will be playing Walton's *Viola Concerto*, while the orchestral items are *Oberon Overture* by Weber and Brahms's *Symphony No 4*.

Choral music enthusiasts can hear the Drakensberg Boys' Choir in concert with the Durban Men's Choir on March 27 at Northwood School in Durban North at 7.30pm. Tickets are R47 and can be booked through Computicket.