



Nikolai Lugansky brings characteristic artistic refinement and strikingly individual musicianship to Prokofiev and Rachmaninov and prepares to unveil fresh ideas on the music of Liszt at Wigmore Hall and Vienna's Konzerthaus

Deep thought and decades of experience continue to nourish Nikolai Lugansky's aristocratic brand of pianism. The Moscow-born artist, lauded for his interpretations of late Romantic repertoire, closes this season with his richly mature reading of Prokofiev's Second Piano Concerto, as soloist with the Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestra in its home venue and on tour to Germany and the Amsterdam Concertgebouw (8-15 July 2011). He turns to Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto as part of his residency at the Festival de la Roque d'Anthéron in August before launching the 2011/12 season with his compatriot's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* on tour to Italy with the St Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra under Yuri Temirkanov (5-6 September). Lugansky, the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Vladimir Jurowski perform the same work in Brussels on 7 September, before they take Rachmaninov on tour again, with the First Piano Concerto scheduled for their concerts in Essen, Stuttgart and Besançon (27, 29 and 30 September).

While success in Moscow's Rachmaninov Competition and victory in the 1994 Tchaikovsky Piano Competition prepared the ground for Nikolai Lugansky's career, the pianist insists that early musical studies away from the keyboard have proved to be of greater value. He points to his forthcoming recitals of Liszt's *Sposalizio* and *Isoldens Liebestod* at Wigmore Hall and Vienna's Konzerthaus (27 and 29 February 2012), and to a developing project to record the composer's *Transcendental Etudes*, *La campanella*, pieces from *Les Années de Pèlerinage* and other works. Lugansky's schedule for 2011/12 also includes performances of concertos by Ravel, Beethoven, Schumann and Bartók, signals of the breadth and depth of his repertoire. He suggests that knowledge of landmark Romantic orchestral and operatic scores, acquired during his teens, has supplied the bedrock on which he has built his interpretations of works for solo piano, those by Liszt increasingly prominent among them.

"I played very little Liszt at a young age, so in some ways it is more difficult coming to these virtuosic pieces later in life," notes Lugansky. "However I do not regret this, as I spent much time listening to music as a teenager, getting to know chamber, symphonic and operatic repertoire. This has given me a different approach than perhaps my contemporaries and colleagues have had. This, I believe, is what makes a difference in my performance of Liszt's music, not my perceived membership of a particular school of piano playing."

Lugansky's artistic independence was undoubtedly influenced and encouraged by his teacher, the legendary Tatiana Nikolayeva, friend of Shostakovich and a performer blessed with gifts of extraordinary insight and intellectual focus. He recalls her 'unbelievable hunger' for music and, almost 18 years after her death, continues to be guided by her desire always to know more about the inner workings of great compositions. "She could not understand anyone who said they were too tired or too busy to listen to music," says Lugansky. "That was simply impossible for her, as someone who had such a full and active life but always found time to listen to great recordings. I am connected to her example."

He adds that Nikolayeva taught invaluable lessons about life drawn from her knowledge of everything from childhood hunger to wartime terror. "Most people today have forgotten what hunger means, what war means," Lugansky observes. "In Russia the Second World War and the hunger that followed in the years after it were unimaginably terrible, as I know from speaking with my father and with Nikolayeva. I still have a connection with this time through what they told me. I also saw how incredibly positive Nikolayeva was with young people. Music and humanity were everything in her life."

Lugansky's personal exploration of music's humanity unfolds next season with Ravel's Piano Concerto for the Left Hand with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic (9 and 11 September 2011). He is set to

perform Beethoven's Piano Concerto No.5 'Emperor' with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and Andris Nelsons (1 and 2 December) before joining his countryman Vasily Petrenko and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra for Beethoven's Piano Concerto No.4 (11, 12 and 15 January 2012). His diary also includes a trip to the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris with the Philharmonia and Esa-Pekka Salonen for Bartók's Piano Concerto No.3 (25 June).

Nikolai Lugansky first visited the West at the age of 15, thanks to Nikolayeva's international recommendations, to make his debut in France. He soon returned for performances in the Netherlands and Germany, gaining the silver medal at the Leipzig International Bach Competition in 1988 and launching his international career as a prodigiously talented teenager. Overseas trips, he remembers, offered heaven-sent opportunities to buy recordings and scores of orchestral works and chamber music.

"I spent practically all of my money earned from concerts on CDs," observes Lugansky. "I bought some piano music but usually returned to Moscow with recordings of symphonic and chamber repertoire. Most good pianists between the age of 15 and 20 practise hard to build the base for their future life, learning the major works of Liszt, Chopin, Rachmaninov and so on. It was not really like this for me: this was the time when I probably studied a greater range of music than any young conductor and certainly works that many pianists of that age do not care to know. For me, coming home to listen to a Bruckner symphony or a Schubert string quartet was the greatest thing in life."

The concentration of works by Rachmaninov in Nikolai Lugansky's forthcoming schedule underlines his status among the world's leading interpreters of the composer's music. He is set to perform the fiendishly difficult Third Piano Concerto with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, the Russian National Orchestra and the Südwestdeutsche Philharmonie Konstanz in an extraordinary sequence of concerts this October. Subsequent dates with Rachmaninov include the Second Piano Concerto with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Charles Dutoit (17 and 18 February 2012); the Sonata No.1 at the Vienna Konzerthaus (29 February), the Third Piano Concerto with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Dutoit (5-10 April), and the Second Piano Concerto with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and Kirill Karabits (9 and 10 May).

Lugansky accepts that his formative years were dominated by great Russian teachers, including Tatiana Kestner, Tatiana Nikolayeva and Sergei Dorensky. And yet the 39-year old artist challenges those who label his work as a product of *the* Russian School, simply pointing to Russia's vast scale and the complexity of her national identity to undermine the expression's meaning. Making music, whether by Rachmaninov or Bach, Beethoven or Scriabin, is a personal matter for Lugansky, one directly informed by distinctive experience, particular lessons learned and individual understanding of human feelings.

"My grandparents on my mother's side were really connected with the earth and their ancestors were peasants," notes Lugansky. "On my father's side, they were Orthodox priests in a village. Perhaps they were a little closer to music through the church, but I don't believe this had any part in my musical gift. I am tired of being asked about the Russian School or the Russian soul, because those things are so general. Of course, I am a Russian pianist and Russian person, connected to the experience of my country's past. But I also feel that my understanding of Rachmaninov or Prokofiev has been shaped more by chance, by the opportunities that came to me when I was young and the good fortune of my life. I feel equally connected to the music of other great composers, such as Beethoven, Brahms, Chopin and Ravel."

NIKOLAI LUGANSKY, selected concerts 2011-12:

London Philharmonic Orchestra / Vladimir Jurowski
RACHMANINOV: Rhapsody on a theme of Paganini
7 September 2011 (Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels)

London Philharmonic Orchestra / Vladimir Jurowski
RACHMANINOV: Piano Concerto No.1
27 September 2011 (Philharmonie, Essen) | 29 September (Liederhalle, Stuttgart) | 30 September (Théâtre Musical de Besançon)

Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Stéphane Denève

RACHMANINOV: Piano Concerto No.3

6 October 2011 (Aberdeen Music Hall) | 7 October 2011 (Usher Hall, Edinburgh) | 8 October 2011 Glasgow Royal Concert Hall

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko

BEETHOVEN: Piano Concerto No.4

11 and 12 January 2012 (Liverpool Philharmonic Hall) | 15 January 2012 (Preston Guild Hall)

Wigmore Hall, BBC Radio 3 Lunchtime Concert

LISZT: *Sposalizio* (from *Les Années des Pèlerinage*), LISZT: *Isolde's Liebestod*, RACHMANINOV: Piano Sonata No.1 op.28

27 February 2012, 13:00 (Wigmore Hall)

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra / Kirill Karabits

RACHMANINOV: Piano Concerto No.2

9 May 2012 (Lighthouse, Poole) | 10 May 2011 (Portsmouth Guild Hall)

For any press enquiries, please contact:

Valerie Barber PR
Suite 2
9a St John's Wood High Street
London NW8 7NG
Tel: +44 (0)20 7586 8560
stefanie@vbpr.co.uk
www.vbpr.co.uk