

## Arts

## Sailing close to the wind

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There are few other piano works that come anywhere close to Liszt's *B Minor Sonata* in sheer scale and awe-inspiring splendour. Maybe Schubert's *Wanderer* or perhaps Schumann's *C Minor Fantasy*, but I doubt it.

It is a fearfully difficult piece to pull off. Its quasi-orchestral density can make it sound uncomfortably clangorous, while the technical pyrotechnics can overshadow the almost spiritual musicality of it. Striking a balance is difficult.

My preference was always the more genial approach by that Chilean legend Claudio Arrau, who managed to infuse the most overtly extrovert Lisztian pieces with a previously undetected depth of feeling.

Dmytro Sukhovienco, who performed the sonata during an all-Liszt piano recital on February 12, had us at the edge of our seats as his performance sailed pretty close to the wind from start to finish.

It was breathtaking, and the risks he took were tremendous, so much so that there were times when he almost came to grief in precisely the same climactic passage, but managed to right himself in time.

**"Sukhovienco had us at the edge of our seats as his performance sailed pretty close to the wind from start to finish"**

It was like watching a sailing yacht race in a fierce gregale. I found myself yearning for the calm gravitas of Arrau but at the same time I was lost in admiration of this young pianist who gave us a performance to remember for a long time.

This is the fundamental difference between a live performance and a recording. One performance will never be similar to another, while a recording is so edited and

played about with, one has to appreciate it in a totally different way.

Very few recordings have us transfixed. There are just three that I can think of in my vast library and all three are live recordings, Artur Schnabel and the Guarneri playing Dvorak's *E Flat Piano Quartet*, Maria Callas's *Tacea la Notte Placida* in *Trovatore*, and Fritz Reiner's recording of Bartok's *Music for Strings Percussion and Celesta* in particular the second movement with its percussive pizzicato and demonic voices.

The rest are beautiful and appealing in varying degrees but none of them can match the real thing.

Sergiu Celibidache compared canned music to canned peas and rarely went anywhere near a recording studio. I must add that the quality of canned peas has improved tremendously since Celibidache's day, and so have the recordings, but the fundamental difference will always be with us.

I found no less than nine *Transcendental Studies* performed in the latter half of the programme, a bit too much after the colossal sonata.

It was a bit like I feel on Christmas Day when the family honours both



Dmytro Sukhovienco

the Maltese and English traditions and serves up *timpana* followed by roast turkey and all the trimmings for lunch, followed by Christmas pudding with custard and brandy butter and Cassatella Siciliana.

The older I become the less am I able to face such a gargantuan menu, and playing those etudes had the same effect. Not that the etudes were not all utterly lovely but it is a fact that one can die of a surfeit of too good a thing, and as they say, an elegant sufficiency would carry the day very nicely.

The ethereal Scarlatti *Sonata* that Sukhovienco performed as his first encore was like a mistral breeze after a nine days of Gregale storms, which although awe-inspiring to watch especially at Ghar id-Dud where the waves rise to fearful heights, become tiresome.

I felt like over-boiled macaroni, which is a pity, as Sukhovienco is a splendid pianist and an even more gifted performer whose adrenalin created magical but also some nail-biting moments in the sonata that I will not forget for a long time.