IUSB's Toradze Performs with Kirov Orchestra

Alexander Toradze (left) and Valery Gergiev take their bows after the Kirov Orchestra performance at IUSB.

St. Petersburg's world-renowned Kirov Orchestra performed at Indiana University South Bend Nov. 9, 1998 with IUSB's Martin Professor of Piano, Alexander Toradze as featured soloist. The concert was a fitting climax to a week of musical activities that launched IUSB's first Piano Festival and the Toradze Concerto Institute. The South Bend performance was part of a 14-city U.S. tour that took the Russian orchestra to major east and west coast cities as well as Chicago. The Kirov's internationally acclaimed conductor, Valery Gergiev, who received an honorary degree in 1996 from IUSB, is a long-time colleague and friend of Toradze.

The Toradze Institute invited ten fellows, who were nominated as being among the most promising young talents on the international piano scene by outstanding heads of U.S. and European piano studios. The fellows were given a week of intensive piano concerti coaching by a faculty of internationally-regarded pianists, including IUSB's Alexander Korsantiya. Both fellows and faculty had opportunities to perform in recital and with local area symphonic orchestras.

The performances of students and maestros with local symphonies, and the final Kirov-Toradze concert, along with the South Bend Symphonic Choir and other local participants, made up the seven consecutive nights of concert performances collectively organized as the IUSB Piano Festival.

In addition, the Toradze Fellows participated in career development seminars directed by institute faculty drawn from music professionals such as artistic directors and producers, music critics, music agents, and foundation directors. Andrew Le, a Fellow from the University of Michigan, was extremely grateful for the career guidance, saying that "there's not really anything out there...that's written to help guide our careers." Juilliard student Sean Botkin concurred, saying that seeking advice on career management while having to focus on competitions and submission of tapes was difficult at best for many musicians.

Although these aspiring artists were competitively selected, they did not compete with each other at the institute, making the experience "unique to the piano world," according to founder Robert Demaree, dean of IUSB's Division of Arts and director of the South Bend Symphonic Choir.

Toradze notes the overwhelming response by members of the music world wanting to become future faculty of the institute, testifying to its importance. "This is...a rare gathering of professionals who join together to develop the talents of young musicians and to propagate the values of classical music in a nurturing, non-commercial environment," he commented.

Supported in part by a grant from Indiana University's Strategic Directions program, the festival and institute have created great excitement in the Michiana community, which sees the annual series of events as putting the area on the nation's cultural map, comparable to what the Van Cliburn competition did many years ago for Fort Worth, Texas.

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