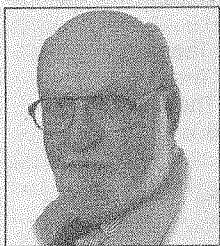


# Pianist, CUSO master Liszt brilliantly

Lithuanian pianist Muza Rubackyte scored a double triumph on Saturday night, Jan. 22, with thrilling performances of Franz Liszt's Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 2 with the Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Steven Larsen. First impressions can be powerful, and I was immediately won over by



**JOHN FRAYNE**

— IN THE CONCERT HALL

the way Rubackyte sat down at the piano and decisively began showing her extraordinary mastery of these virtuoso concertos. She exuded a feeling of total confidence. One could sit back, secure in the knowledge that absolutely nothing could go wrong.

Liszt, born 200 years ago, was a pianist of legendary brilliance, and these concertos are full of high hurdles. In the dazzling scalar passages, Rubackyte was outstanding in her technical control. When called for, she also could storm and thunder against the full orchestra. In more lyrical passages, she was able to find the emotional depth between the notes. In one of these songful passages in the



Pianist Muza Rubackyte performed Jan. 22 with the Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra in Krannert Center's Foellinger Great Hall.

Second Concerto, she was supported by rich-toned playing by cellist Barbara Hedlund.

Most importantly, Rubackyte projected the feeling that these concertos were joyous and just plain fun. The support she received from Maestro Larsen and the symphony, especially the woodwinds, was both sensitive and robust in the sometimes wild give-and-take of these works. Percussionist Ricardo Flores showed how important the small but piercing sounds of the triangle can be in the First Concerto. After both

concertos, there were cheers and bravos from the audience, most of whom gave the pianist a double standing ovation. Flowers were presented, and a lonely sheet from a program fluttered down into the orchestra. The appearance of Rubackyte was sponsored in part by Mr. and Mrs. James Liautaud. The con-

cert was dedicated to the memory of Joe Dingee, who had been executive director of the C-U Symphony from 2007 to 2010.

The program had opened with a robust reading of the "Cockaigne" Overture of Sir Edward Elgar. The rousing conclusion to the evening was the brassy "Sinfonietta" of Leos Janacek. From where I sat, I could see six trumpeters up in the balcony, and a total of 25 brass players were involved in this work. From the state of my eardrums at concert's end, I can readily believe that. Amid the solo and group bows for the brass, there was a well-deserved bow for the woodwinds and especially flutist Mary Leathers Chapman.

Thursday night's performance by the Russian National Ballet Theatre of Sergei Prokofiev's "Cinderella" was in most respects greatly superior to its Tuesday evening opening. One person said to me, "It looks like a different company!" The costumes for "Cinderella" were brilliant, and the scenic drops achieved much with relatively simple materials.

Marianna Tchemalina was pathetic and lovable as Cinderella, and Ruslan Mukhambetkaliev achieved impressive leaps as the admirable Prince. Evgeny Rudakov, in dreadful-

looking drag, was hilarious as the stepmother of hopelessly awkward offspring, danced by Elena Khorosheva and Viktoria Krakhmaleva. Marat Abdrahmanov offered droll moments as the Dance Master, and Didar Sarsembaev, as the Jester, drew consistent applause for his athletic leaps. Ekaterina Egorova was queenly and commanding as the Fairy Godmother.

The program notes of this Russian company remind me of the adage, "You can't believe everything you read." The synopsis in the program speaks of oranges being offered to guests at the prince's ball. On Thursday, oranges turned into flowers. Also, the dropping of the second slipper by Cinderella in the final scene, revealing her identity, escaped me. Suddenly, it was just there!

"Cinderella" is the ultimate "rags to riches" story, and this performance left a warm glow behind it and a happy ending to this visit from the Russian National Ballet Theatre. But oh, those Russian names! A proof-reader's nightmare!

John Frayne hosts "Classics of the Phonograph" on Saturdays at WILL-FM and, in retirement, teaches at the University of Illinois. He can be reached at [frayne@illinois.edu](mailto:frayne@illinois.edu).

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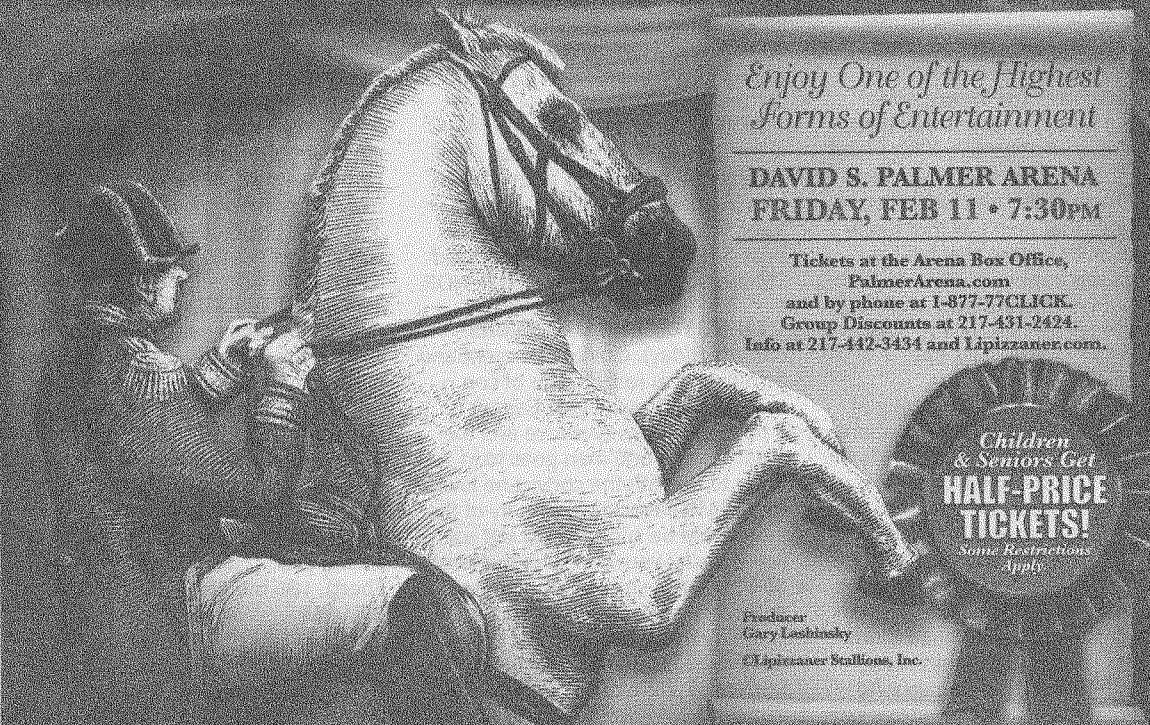


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