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MUSIC FESTIVAL: EVER-RISING STARS

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Italian pianist Federico Colli is on the esteemed roster of the Eilat Chamber Music Festival.



Italian pianist Federico Colli. (photo credit:PR)

Not only is Eilat the ideal winter vacation destination, but around this time of year you can also get to hear some quality live music betwixt taking dips in the hotel pool or the ever-enticing waters of the Red Sea. That has certainly been the case for at least the past dozen years and, judging by the talented performers on the bill, the 12th edition of the Eilat Chamber Music Festival, which is slated for February 1 to 4, will keep the topnotch musical goodies coming.

Next week's roll call includes such stellar members of the global classical community as Russian violinist Viktoria Mullova, who will join forces with the Geneva Camerata, with young Israeli conductor David Greilsammer wielding the baton. And there are more headliners on the agenda, including 15-year-old Russian wunderkind pianist Alexander Malofeev and internationally acclaimed Italian pianist Federico Colli. During his brief sojourn down south, the 28-year-old Colli will perform six sonatas by Scarlatti, as well as sonatas 1, 12 and 22 by Beethoven.

Colli came to wider notice in 2011 when he won first place at the Salzburg Mozart Competition. His public profile went up even further the following year when he won the gold medal at the Leeds International Piano Competition in the UK. The pianist is unequivocal about the importance of the latter success for his burgeoning career.

"It was a life-changing experience," he declares. "It was very important for me, personally and professionally." By all accounts, it was both a challenging and toughening event for Colli.

"I had the opportunity to go up on stage and to feel the stress before going on the stage, and I really grew up as a person. But the most important thing was for my career. For me, there is life before Leeds and life after Leeds." he recounts.

Colli says that he quickly realized that it's not enough to make the summit.

"When you reach the top of the mountain, you want to remain there," he observes. "In one way, it was an aim for me; but in another way, it was the beginning of a new chapter in my life."

Colli started playing the piano when he was a young lad, but at the time it was just that – playing around and trying to find pretty notes and chords.

He didn't have too much in the way of musical role models.

"No one in my family could understand what drew me to make music. My parents are in completely different areas of life. They are in science. They have a totally different status of mind," he says.

Even so, there was some concrete evidence of a general appreciation of music and music-making in the Colli household.

"Yes, there was a piano, but it was really like playing a game, like playing football," he says.

Things took a somewhat more serious turn when the youngster got a new tutor.

"When I was eight I changed my teacher, and I started playing things by Bach and a little bit of Schumann," he recalls. "Something started happening, but it was a very natural process. It was always very natural for me. The music was always there, behind my horizon, and I just had a very natural feeling towards the music."

Colli says that one cannot stress enough the importance of one's education dispenser. It was when he moved on to a third teacher, at age 16, which also entailed a change of cultural tack, that his musical intent took an incremental step towards considering music as his professional path in life.

"I changed from an Italian school to a Russian school [in Italy]. I learned so much from my teacher there. If you have a good teacher, he will teach you to put your soul into improving yourself," he asserts.

The teenage Colli certainly put his soul, heart and body into finding his own way through the intricacies of the keyboard. After four years of Russianbased tuition, he upped his educational ante by enrolling at the Imola International Piano Academy, in the north of Italy, and made great strides there before moving on to the Salzburg Mozarteum in Austria.

Of course now, at the age of 28, even after his successes to date and playing at such illustrious venues as the Musikverein in Vienna, Nikkei Hall in Tokyo, Salle Cortot in Paris, Rudolfinum – Dvorak Hall in Prague and Queen Elizabeth Hall in London, Colli knows he is far from being the finished article.

"The negative side of art is that as soon you understand something, you discover that you are nothing compared to what you still have to learn," Colli notes. "When you reach a point, you open your eyes, look ahead and say, 'Oh my God! What I still have to do now.' I look at my next step and all the work and the amount of energy I have to spend. It is a neverending search."

With that honest attitude toward his craft, Colli looks odds on to maintain a steep learning continuum, and it should be fascinating to follow his progress.

The Eilat Chamber Music Festival, hosted by the Dan Eilat Hotel, takes place February 1 to 4.