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Federico Colli and his Bach: the moment when we stop counting the pulse

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Federico Colli

photo: Ivan Korč

The Italian pianist Federico Colli took the step twice in Ostrava. The young artist was introduced on April 4 alongside the Janacek Philharmonic in the Concerto no. 1 in B flat minor by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Then, on April 8, he played at the Ostrava House of Culture in a separate piano recital where, he proposed only works of famous baroque masters.

The baroque style is particularly close this year to the 30-year-old Italian pianist with curly brown hair. His debut CD with sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti was made for Chandos, and this year- with the same label- he released a new album with compositions by Johann Sebastian Bach. The mentioned masters of the late Baroque were also present in the program of Colli's recital. The Italian pianist greeted politely a filled large hall. A confirmation that the concert series of the Janacek Philharmonic enjoys a continuous popularity of listeners.



photo: Ivan Korč

First, a change was announced. Instead of the expected order, the Italian pianist opened with the Bach Partita no. 4 in D major, BWV 828. The slim young man, who was almost lost in his suit, played the *Overture* in French syncopated rhythms with a spectacular elegance and sweeping takeoff, which could not be missing of the finest and most dynamic timbral contrasts. A grandiose three-voice fugue showed his brilliant technique, performed without a single superfluous or lost notes. The following sections were not merely a series of conflicting

movements, but each of them was trying to locate striking features and an inner beauty that makes Bach's music shine.

Allemande flashed a vaguely nostalgic and softly meditative light, *Courante* screamed fast lightning and precise melodic ornaments, *Aria* has surprised with sweet melodies and joviality, *Sarabande* was full of supple tenderness and amazing softness of tone (the minutely detailed work with the left pedal), *Minuet* performed as a pleasantly relaxing breath, before the incredible final, the giant *Gigue*. Colli's interpretation radiated joy, perfect empathy, understanding and humility, sometimes the storms flooded the hall of supreme virtuosity. In this way I always wanted to hear Bach: as an elusive genius, who defies the conventions and exceeds all sorts of interpretation and musical limit.



photo: Ivan Korč

Like a counterpoint, six Sonátas by Domenico Scarlatti were introducing the second half of Colli's recital. They have shown that the pianist is solid not only in polyphonic texture of Bach's music, but in a reliably way he can turn on and color the cantabile style of these brilliant songs. Colli played Scarlatti in a nearly unbroken race, as significant whimsical sketches, without unnecessary demands of philosophy, not with a fiery temperament, but rather with learned and readable ornaments and a graceful tone. The individual sonatas gleamed with wit, with an eccentric *staccato* rhythm, heady lifts of intervals and filigree dynamics.



photo: Ivan Korč

At the end of the recital, Colli returned again to Bach and his Ciaccona in D minor BWV 1004, in the arrangement of Ferruccio Busoni. The mysticism, almost twenty-minute of music, is one of the central points of Bach's works. Anyone who has anything to do with his music, must deal with this milestone. Colli proved that he is ready for this. His Ciaccona and the breathtaking variations had stunning proportions and gradations in a major surreal silence, really impressive as "a victory of the spirit over the matter".

Above the fascinating precision, the expressive interiority and complexity, Colli's idea is breathtaking. Only such a pianist can afford to play, as an encore, the noble and melancholy aria "Lascia ch'io pianga" from Handel's Rinaldo. After which, you can not ask anything. I liked his unpretentious personality, introverted, polite and tasteful, without a hint of self-centeredness. Uselessly looking for some gaps, weaknesses and inconsistencies, none of them was present in his interpretation of a timeless beauty. The pianist really deserves unconditional praises.
