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Kazakhstan Embassy's "Open-Door Hospitality" Welcomes Pianist Eric Himy in WIPAC's "Winter Interlude"

by [H and L Polgar](#) • February 24, 2019

An old Kazakh legend speaks of a time when Song flew over the earth, the high mountains and the sea, but did not remain in any of those places until it reached the wide steppes of the Kazakh plains where it could fly freely and unimpeded. It was then that Kazakhs and Song remained forever friends.

And music did fly freely and beautifully for those who were brave enough to venture out during the wintry weather to be treated to a superb musical performance by concert pianist Eric Himy at the Embassy of Kazakhstan. Sponsored by the Washington International Piano Arts Council, the concert marked WIPAC's Winter Interlude "An Evening of Classical Music," with Honorary Chairs, Ambassador of Kazakhstan, H.E. Erzhan Kazykhanov and Mrs. Danara Kazykhanov. In her warm remarks, Mrs. Kazykhanov welcomed the audience to the Embassy "in the tradition of open-door hospitality."

Following introductory comments by the evening's host and WIPAC's Diplomatic Liaison, Rhoda Septilici, as well as by the Concert Committee Chair, Countess Vladimir Tolstoy Miloslavsky, WIPAC's founder and Board Chair Chateau Gardecki described Himy as a "rare gem of a pianist."

Eric Himy is a distinguished pianist who exudes the confidence of a seasoned virtuoso giving his audience the assurance that they will be graced with a memorable performance. He shared the above-referenced Kazakhstan legend on Song, and very fittingly performed two pieces adapted from Kazakhstan's rich folk musical heritage in honor of HE The Ambassador and Mrs. Erzhan Kazykhanov.

The first was a piece written by Alexander Zatayevich, a Russian music ethnographer and exponent of Central Asian folk music. The pianist also revealed the intensity of Kazakh folk

music with his own original composition based on those tunes. Mrs. Stoytchev was moved so deeply that she commented on Mr. Himy's performance, "He expressed our country's music with great beauty, excitement and elegance."

The pianist was in complete command of the next piece on the program as he continued with works by Maurice Ravel. "Ondine" from the Suite "Gaspards de la Nuit," is often described as the most difficult piece in the classical piano repertoire. Historian Alexander Eccles stated, "When pianists think of 'Gaspard de la Nuit,' their hearts stop. Ravel's masterpiece is as famous for its depiction of Aloysius Bertrand's poems as it is infamous for its stunning virtuosity." And the audience's hearts did stop as Himy, with great virtuosity, 'elan' and drama, evoked the words of the poet, "Listen, do you know what you hear? Handfuls of rain that I've thrown against your window, thrown by me, Ondine, spirit of the water?" His performance was flawless.

Alborada del Gracioso or, translated to English, "Morning Song of a Jester," is part of a five-piece suite, *Miroirs*, by Ravel. Mr. Himy continued to mesmerize his audience, masterfully recreating the sound of guitar music with a work that was influenced by Spanish folk music.

"Piece en forme de Habanera" was originally written by Ravel as a vocalise-etude for voice and piano in 1907, and later transcribed in many versions. Such was Himy's understanding of the music that he was able to tame the fiendishly difficult piece with technical and interpretive mastery of the piano.

Before performing the Chopin group of compositions, he captivated the audience with some statistics about the most famous composers. According to the NY Times, Mr. Himy explained, Mozart, who died at age 31, left 240 hours of music; Bach left 175, and Beethoven 95 hours. Chopin, who died at 39, composed 18 hours of music mostly for the piano but is often considered the greatest of all composers. He did not like to perform in concerts performing perhaps only about 20 times in his lifetime, but preferred to play in "salons" of smaller audiences such as the elegant music room of the Kazakhstan Embassy.

The familiar sounds of Chopin's *Fantasia-Impromptu* Opus 66, *Etude* Opus 25 No 6, *Nocturne* Opus 27 No 2, and the *Ballade* Opus 23 in g minor were so captivating, that the audience did not dare applaud between pieces. So deeply involved in the performance were the listeners, they could not intrude on the flow of Himy's interpretation of Chopin.

Himy explained that as a young person, he was influenced by the recordings of great pianists of the earlier part of the century, in particular Ignatz Friedman who was one of the "greats" in his performance of Chopin's *Mazurka* in c minor Opus 63 No. 3. One is reminded of the legend of the West African Sankofa bird, which is the depiction of a bird whose feet are facing forward and his face is looking back, reflecting on the past to create a new future. Indeed, Himy's Chopin performances have that quality of Old World musical insights whilst creating a new enriched style capturing new musical treasures of the repertoire.

The evening could not be made possible without its dedicated patrons and volunteers, to whom the President of WIPAC, Michael Davidson, extended his heartfelt appreciation.



