

Antonio Iturrioz played a world-class concert at the Sebastopol Center for the Arts!

By Katie Ketchum

Cuban born pianist, Antonio Iturrioz, thrilled and charmed the large audience at Sebastopol Center for the Arts on Saturday, February 27th.

Antonio Iturrioz is known internationally for his playing on his outstanding film "The Art of the Left Hand" that has aired on PBS. His new Godowsky film, The Buddha of the Piano, will be shown at the Rialto Theater in Santa Rosa on March 25.

The concert on Saturday was very unique. In tribute to Robert Schumann and Frederic Chopin's 200th birthday Iturrioz played some of their works seldom heard, as well as old favorites. Iturrioz has the ability to take risks emotionally with his playing while never sacrificing perfection. His tone is like butter, and he played Schumann's "Traumerei" with more rounded tones and compassion than even Horowitz, whom this reviewer heard in Toronto, in the 1970's.

Aria from Violin Sonata #3 by J.S. Bach arranged by Leopold Godowsky, Two Posthumous Etudes by Robert Schumann and Polonaise-Fantasie, Op. 61 by Frederic Chopin, (the last major work he wrote), were intriguing works passionately played by Iturrioz.

The program was laced with Iturrioz's charming and informative commentary. He mentioned that there was speculation that Brahms might have "re-composed" the Posthumous Schumann Etudes and sure enough, they were very "Brahms like". Of course Brahms worshipped Schumann as a mentor, a friend and composer.

Iturrioz quoted from Oscar Wilde's impression of Chopin: "After listening to Chopin I feel as if I have been weeping over sins that I have never committed and mourning over tragedies that were not my own." He played the Aeolian Harp and Revolutionary Etude by Chopin. His interpretation of the Aeolian Harp was perfection. His lush, gorgeous tones enraptured the audience. His tempo of the Revolutionary Etude was fast and never lagged. Even with speed, Iturrioz maintains that "melt in your mouth" tone.

The second half of the program began with Sonoma County composer Jim Davis. Davis' nephew found this composition and others on some old tapes he found. Davis's piece was an interesting work of light improvisation.

Felix Blumenfeld's Etude for the left hand, sounded like a two handed piece and Iturrioz played it masterfully.

The program ended with Gottschalk's "Andante from the Night in the Tropics" and "El Cocoye". Antonio explained that these pieces were composed when American pianist/composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk was staying in Cuba and Martinique.

Antonio's rendition of "El Cocoye" was breathtaking. The listener was transported to the tropics and could actually hear the bird's song.

Iturrioz received a standing ovation with his encore "Noche Azul" by Cuban composer Ernesto Lecuona. This was an introduction into a whole new style of piano composition and piano playing. Iturrioz had the authority to make that shift on every level; soul, technique, and style.

It is very rare to hear a pianist who has such brilliant technique as Antonio Iturrioz has, and use it to support

the depth of emotion and soul that he was able to express.