

# Pianist Alexander Schimpf Dazzles JCA Concert Audience

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By Robert W. Plyler , The Post-Journal

German-born pianist Alexander Schimpf thrilled a large audience at St. Luke's Episcopal Church Friday evening in a concert filled with stunning techniques, in wildly divergent styles.

The concert was the second in the 2012-13 season of performances, sponsored by the Jamestown Concert Association. Schimpf's concert was the most recent in a long line of sparkling piano concerts, spread over recent JCA seasons.

The first half of the evening's program might be called French in style, although the first work was by a German: no less than Johann Sebastian Bach. The artist performed "French Suite No. 5, in G Major, BWV 816," in a style so light and transparent it hardly seemed he was touching the keys, and yet the twining melodies and counter melodies astonished the ear and the mind.

He followed his crystalline Bach with evocations of France from the pen of Claude Debussy. "Images II" offered bells ringing through leaves, the moon descending on a ruined temple, and a pond filled with goldfish. In all cases, his hands created a vast matrix of sounds, through which melodies which evoked visual images sang out and then retreated back into the melange.

The first half of the program ended with another evocative work from Debussy, "L'Isle Joyeuse," a work inspired by a painting of a party departing for a mystical island, sacred to the goddess Venus. The complex and rapid fire sounds brought the audience past enthusiastic applause and began an atmosphere of clear adulation which continued throughout the second half.

Throughout the evening, the handsome young pianist remained completely silent, never speaking so much as "Thank you." He kept a handkerchief inside the lip of the piano, with which he frequently mopped his forehead.

The second half of the program was distinctly German, with echoes of Eastern Europe, for good measure. Beethoven's well-known "Piano Sonata in C Minor, Op. 13, Pathetique," was performed strongly and passionately, although he seemed to take a surprising lot of creative liberties with the great composer's choices, especially brief pauses, inserted often into passages which are written to have relentless tempi.

The evening concluded with a knuckle-buster by Franz Liszt: "Ballade No. 2 in B Minor." The work creates an atmosphere of roiling, fiercely kinetic bass notes, from which lyrical melodies float upward for a delightful effect. Schimpf seemed to master the demands of the work with ease.

The audience rose in ovation at the completion of the Liszt work, and though he politely acknowledged the applause with bow after bow, there was no encore offered.

It was an evening of extraordinary artistry, obviously much enjoyed.

The next concert in the JCA season will be Dec. 5 at the Reg Lenna Civic Center, when Symphony Syracuse will perform light classics to welcome the holiday season.