

The Russian pianist was larger than life at the Phillips Collection

EVGENIA RUBINOVA'S BOLD STROKES

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Some of the huge paintings in the music room of the Phillips Collection are best viewed from a distance, and there were times during the impressive recital that Russian pianist Evgenia Rubinova brought there on Sunday when a little more distance also would have been welcome.

Rubinova, a silver medalist at the 2003 Leeds International Competition, plays with enormous power. The opening strokes of the Beethoven C Minor Sonata, Op. 111, tore through the little hall almost too violently to bear up close. The fugue that followed, played with fervent intensity and astonishing control, felt like it was being heard from inside the instrument itself, a not altogether comfortable and sometimes disorienting position to be in. But as peace asserted itself as the sonata's variations unfolded, as the play of light and passion in Dutilleaux's "Choral et Variations" and the introspection of Rachmaninoff's "Six Moments Musicaux" played themselves out, intimacy once again became an ally.

Impressive as her strength and technique are, however, Rubinova is not one of those pianists for whom velocity and power are substitutes for brains and musicianship. Her performance of the Dutilleaux variations reflected a thoughtful and creative artistic imagination, one that could pay close attention to details while never losing sight of the larger landscape, and her Rachmaninoff, with its focus on color and shape, was sensitive and restrained.

Joan Reinthaler