

Getting in tune with himself

Photo courtesy of the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival

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Pianist Ivan Moshchuk, a native of Grosse Pointe Farms who has performed internationally, will be back to perform as part of the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival for a concert June 25 at Grosse Pointe Memorial Church.

GROSSE POINTE FARMS — Many parents dream of their children becoming doctors, and that was the path Ivan Moshchuk planned to follow until his passion for music took him on an unexpected detour.

Born in Russia and raised in Grosse Pointe Farms, the 2009 Grosse Pointe South High School graduate has been playing piano since he was a child, and while he's only 23, he's already won accolades and performed for international audiences. He can't say when he knew he wanted to become a professional classical musician, but he can say it was a decision long in the making.

"There was not a single moment," Moshchuk said in an email interview while he was in Paris recently to continue his musical studies. "Music was always present in my life, and through a gradual process, I came to understand what it means to me and its role in my life."

Moshchuk will return home to make his debut with the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival when he performs a piano recital of works by J.S. Bach and Sergei Rachmaninoff at 7:30 p.m. June 25 at Grosse Pointe Memorial Church in Grosse Pointe Farms. The festival runs through June 29 at various venues in metro Detroit. He'll perform Bach's "Partita No. 4 in D major, BWV 828" and "Toccatina in E minor, BWV 914," along with Rachmaninoff's "Etudes-Tableaux, Op. 39."

"I have played (these) pieces before in various places," Moshchuk said. "This is the first time I will be playing them in this particular combination. Some of them push the limits of the piano, as well as physical human limits. However, I am compelled to perform this program because it encompasses the entire evolution of music as I understand it. Harmony, one of the most important ingredients in music — for me, harmony begins with Bach and ends with Rachmaninoff."

Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival Artistic Director James Tocco said the pieces Moshchuk will play "are rarely performed in their entirety because they're so daunting," but he's convinced Moshchuk is "very much up to the challenge."

Tocco said Moshchuk "came to my attention about two years ago through mutual friends." Watching a recording of the pianist being interviewed for a public radio television program, "I was struck by how intelligent this young man was, and I was also struck by the power and beauty of his playing."

Moshchuk is the younger of two sons born to Nikolai and Ludmila Moshchuk. He was born in Moscow, but his parents moved to Michigan when he was 5 and his older brother, Alexander, was 14. The Moshchuk parents still live in the Farms.

The Moshchuk family was one of music aficionados, and Nikolai Moshchuk said they attended classical music performances locally and in New York and Washington, D.C., “whenever we could.” Their younger son began playing piano around age 5, after watching his older brother study the instrument.

“I started because I wanted to be like my older brother,” Ivan Moshchuk said via email.

He said his parents “are not musicians,” but “the house was always filled with all kinds of music. I was not aware of it then, but now I see how it left a big impression on me.”

Nikolai Moshchuk said his wife was a computer science engineer working in the aerospace industry in Moscow, but she left her job to focus on raising her sons. For the last 20 years, Nikolai Moshchuk said he has worked in research and development for General Motors. Their older son is now a researcher at Microsoft in Seattle, he said. Nikolai Moshchuk said Ivan, too, seemed destined for a career in the sciences, having been accepted into the biology programs at Duke University and Johns Hopkins University, where he was to double-major in music and biology, and eventually become a doctor.

“He actually was well-rounded,” Nikolai Moshchuk said of Ivan, who played soccer in middle school and was on the varsity tennis team in high school. “We never thought about this career (in music) during his childhood. He maintained his curriculum and played sports during high school. He was a very good student.”

When the couple’s younger son announced his intention to focus on music instead, his parents were surprised and concerned about whether he could make a living doing it.

“We’ve always been worrying about this area,” Nikolai Moshchuk admitted. “Of course, music is wonderful when you do it for a hobby, but (as a profession), it’s very tough.”

Despite their fears, the Moshchuks have been supportive of Ivan.

“In the beginning, we were not missing any of his concerts,” said Nikolai Moshchuk, adding that since his son began performing internationally, they haven’t been able to attend all of his shows. They have traveled to see him play, however, including many visits to Baltimore while Ivan was at the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University.

“We were very happy to see him becoming more professional,” Nikolai Moshchuk said. “I’m proud to watch Ivan’s accomplishments.”

Moshchuk has performed with the Lublin Chamber Orchestra in Poland and the Kharkiv Philharmonic in Ukraine, toured the Netherlands this May for a five-concert solo tour, played recitals across the United States and in France and Italy, and recently completed a residency at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris. He graduated from the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University with a bachelor’s degree in piano performance, and his father said Moshchuk will be starting the doctoral music program at the University of Cincinnati this fall.

Ivan Moshchuk's ability to find the emotional core of the music is something that has struck audiences.

"Maybe it's just because we're his parents and we're biased, but we really enjoy his interpretations," Nikolai Moshchuk said.

That's a sentiment that's shared by a number of Ivan Moshchuk's peers. His honors include being named the 2010 Gilmore Young Artist recipient.

Tocco, an acclaimed pianist himself, said this "is a real coup" for a young artist.

"He's the real deal — he's not just another talented kid," Tocco said. "He's a poet of the piano. ... He just seems to have touched everyone who's heard him the same way he touched me. ... He has poetry in his incredibly beautiful subjective sound, with all sorts of personal color and tone, and he has wonderful sweep and power when he plays that can simply blow everybody away when the music calls for it."

Gilmore officials said the young pianist immediately stood out to them.

"We were delighted to find the very gifted Ivan when he was still in high school right here in Michigan," said Gilmore Director Dan Gustin via email. "He has appeared here at The Gilmore a number of times, and we have followed his progress at the Peabody Conservatory studying with the legendary Leon Fleisher. We are proud that his Gilmore Young Artist Award has helped him achieve some of his artistic goals in his developing career."

Some musicians might dream of fame and fortune, but Moshchuk said he wants "to be a positive force of change in this world." The multilingual pianist — who speaks English, Russian, French and some German — recognizes that music is an international language that can bridge barriers.

"The piano is just an instrument — a means of communication," Moshchuk said. "I have no preference among instruments; each is important for its own reason. I cannot say I chose piano — it just happened. It is a way for me to share my stories with my audience. If I was not playing piano, I would find another means. The challenge is in finding and perfecting the stories."

Music is a natural fit for Ivan Moshchuk.

"The best way to know Ivan is to listen to him (play piano)," Nikolai Moshchuk said. "That will speak for (him)."

Ivan Moshchuk's concert is preceded by a prelude at 6:45 p.m. June 25 by the Telegraph Quartet, which recently won the grand prize at the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition.

Grosse Pointe Memorial Church is located at 16 Lake Shore. Tickets to the concert are \$35 for adults and \$10 for students ages 25 and younger in advance, or an additional \$5 at the door. For tickets or more information, visit www.greatlakeschambermusic.org or call (248) 559-2097.

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