

Piano paves path to 'homecoming' for York Region artist



By Brock Weir

Growing up in Siberia with a family he describes as a 'long line of engineers and soldiers,' young Vlad Soloviev didn't have many opportunities to flex his musical muscles.

But that all changed as a teen when his family moved from Siberia to York Region and his parents bought him his very first piano. That first piano started Mr. Soloviev on a journey that has taken him around the world and this Friday, April 13, it brings him home again as part of the Great Artist Music Series at the Aurora Cultural Centre.

The Toronto-based pianist, chamber musician and choral conductor has been hailed for his versatile repertoire, championing the works not only of the classics, but also contemporary Canadian composers.

This week, the music director at Newmarket's Trinity United Church will present works by Debussy, Beethoven, Busoni, Liszt and Scriabin, all with an eye 'and ear' of forging a connection with local audiences.

'We live in a time where people are short on time and not everyone is willing to spend that time listening to classical music, and that takes a lot of time to get to know,' says Mr. Soloviev, stating he wants audience members to feel these are works that are as relevant today as ever before. 'It is still something worth their while listening to, that there is a back and forth on what compelled the composer to write it, while people are still listening to it 300 years later.'

Having arrived in Canada at the age of 14 and settling in Woodbridge, it took Mr. Soloviev just two years to decide to take the piano more seriously, pursuing arts programs at Unionville High School and moving on to higher things.

'Siberia had music schools, but it is not really a place where you would be encouraged to do that sort of thing, especially in a family like mine,' he says. 'I did a lot of math and sports and there was no real time for music with all the math I was doing, but I always wanted to play. I had been interested in the piano for as long as I can remember.'

'When we moved here, apart from the complete change of scenery, language and culture, suddenly I had a lot of free time on my hands. I went to my parents one more time to see if we could do this, so they bought me a piano. They were never against music, but they had their priorities elsewhere.'

Finally having the chance to pursue this dream, Vlad says he experienced 'such a joy' in the process. His path was unorthodox, he says, in that it was something he always liked and didn't have any outside pressure to stick to his studies. He had time to grow on his own.

'You try and you fail, you try and you fail, sometimes it gets discouraging,' he says. 'You go to a serious school where people practice twelve hours a day and it is a very rigorous environment. Any conscious person would ask themselves if they are good enough to do this' and my answer to that didn't become much later.'

As a pianist, Vlad says he has a particular affinity for Beethoven because he 'infuses his music with a sort of humanistic mission' which he finds fascinating.

'Growing up in the atmosphere of the enlightenment, especially in the early years of the French revolution, he was really inspired by these ideas that were so progressive at the time,' he says. 'A lot of his music displays that with things. A lot of his piano sonatas are different for that reason too. The way he structures them, there is some deep stuff in there and absolutely fascinating to learn and

play. They are quite beautiful works in themselves. It has been one of my goals to play and record his last six piano sonatas. I am five down and one to go!?

Looking ahead to Friday, Vlad says he is particularly excited not only to play before a hometown crowd, but also at the opportunity to take what he describes as a more 'informal' approach to a mainstream classical concert.

He wants an evening that will be 'approachable and fun' and an evening that will impart the joy he gets from playing pieces like Beethoven's later sonatas, which 'gives me almost a quasi-religious experience every time I play them.'

'I want to see if I can make it happen so people who listen to a Beethoven sonata for the very first time will be able to get something cool, profound and transformative and unique that they will remember and take with them out of the concert hall.'

For more information, including tickets, visit www.auroraculturalcentre.ca/events/vladsoloviev or call 905-713-1818. The Great Artist Series is sponsored by Bonnie and Norbert Kraft.