

Pianist let her music 'sing'

By IFAN PAYNE
Music Critic

I do not know whether it is by chance only that I seem to be hearing more and more of the music of Alexander Scriabin of late, or whether there is indeed an increase of interest in his work. Whatever the reason, the opportunity to hear more than the almost-popular *The Poem of Ecstasy* is most welcome. Maybe it is my imagination, but I do have the feeling that there has in particular been an increase in the number of recordings of the Russian composer's piano music in the past year or two. In keeping with this increased interest, it was a pleasure to hear five of the preludes from Scriabin's *24 Preludes, Opus 11* performed by Victoria Spence at All Faiths Auditorium on Sunday afternoon.

It was immediately apparent that Miss Spence is a fluent and sensitive pianist who not only plays with fine tonal control but who also has at her command an enviably wide dynamic

range. Both these characteristics were in evidence during her tender and lyrical playing of the *Prelude No. 11* on the one hand and the powerful *No. 6* on the other. But above all, it was a pleasure to hear the way in which she allowed the music to sing in *No. 11*.

There were hints of this same latter quality during her performance of Handel's *Suite No. 2 in F Major*, especially during the aria-like first movement. The wide dynamic range was impressive during Debussy's *Etudes, pour les octaves* and Copland's *Passacalia* and in both of these works, as in the Scriabin, it was evident that Miss Spence is a gifted and accomplished pianist with technique to spare, but more importantly, with the ability to see beyond the mere notes to the music beneath and to communicate her feeling for that music.

On the other hand, it would be turning the blind eye of folly for me not to remark that when Miss Spence met

Herr Beethoven on this sunny fall afternoon, the two of them did not exactly hit it off. I am not here referring to the memory lapses — which were not confined to Beethoven's music and which happen to the best and worst of us — but rather to the way in which she crowded the music and bustled it along, refusing to allow the delightful phrases of the *Sonata, Op. 31, No. 3* to breathe, let alone to sparkle. For all his gruff exterior, Ludwig can be a jolly fellow, but one has to relax a bit in his company in order to realize this.

It seemed as though Miss Spence was not fully prepared for her recital, and at the end I could not help but feel that for a so fundamentally skilled and talented a musician to be unable — for whatever the reasons — to devote her complete attention to the preparation of her music is a tragedy. For those of us who have little talent, to watch the non-fulfillment of so much potential is sad, to say the least.

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