



Regina Albrink. (Photo/Ben Hansen)

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Enthusiastic applause greeted Dutch pianist Regina Albrink when she appeared at Ben's Theater Jomtien to give a much-anticipated piano recital of classical music. She performed the entire concert from memory; a well-balanced programme of varied piano works which ensured that there was something for everyone.

The recital opened with Mozart's *Piano Sonata No. 12 in F (K. 332)*, which was published in 1784 and thought to have been written the previous year. As was customary at the time, the sonata was written in three movements with a slow one in the middle. Regina gave a rhythmic performance of the opening movement with good dynamic contrast and a clear sense of phrasing. I enjoyed her delicate and thoughtful approach. The second movement was given a rather more romantic treatment and would have sounded familiar to anyone who had seen *Immortal Beloved*, the 1994 movie about the life of Beethoven. The lively, galloping third

movement was technically impressive with fast passage work in the right hand which Regina handled impeccably.

Many pianists regard Chopin's *Piano Sonata No. 3 in B minor, Op. 58* as something of a beast, on account of its many challenges. It's considered to be one of the composer's most difficult works, both technically and musically. It's a challenge for the audience too, but I couldn't help noticing that everyone in Ben's Theater was listening throughout with rapt attention.

Dating from 1844, the sonata is cast in four movements and Regina seemed to be much more at home in this work. The first movement requires a fair amount of physical strength and I was impressed by Regina's confident and powerful playing and her ability to bring out the melodic elements. There were many charming moments. The second movement is a brief yet sparkling *Scherzo* played at a hair-raising speed with many virtuoso finger-fracturing passages.

Regina handled the challenges with consummate

ease and with superbly crisp articulation. Her playing of the lyrical middle section was magical. But for me, one of the highlights of the evening was the third movement which lies at the heart of the sonata, with subtle use of rich, sometimes unexpected harmonies and a beautifully poignant melody. When this melody returned later in the movement, the moment was sublime indeed. Regina seemed in her element in this movement giving a remarkably poetic performance. She launched confidently into the turbulent fourth movement, and brought drama to the work with an infectious sense of rhythm and sparkling articulation.

Regina has had a busy musical career. After finishing her studies at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest, she took part in many concerts and theater productions in the Netherlands. She performed Chopin's *First Piano Concerto* at the Alte Oper in Frankfurt and at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. In 2002, her recording of works by Gottschalk was well received by the press. For some years, Regina has given an annual Christmas recital in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw.

Louis Moreau Gottschalk was a 19<sup>th</sup> century American composer, who achieved fame as a performer of his own piano works and he was the first to make use of Afro-American folk melodies. Regina played three works by Gottschalk, beginning with the tender *Berceuse (Lullaby)*; a lovely sensitive

performance in which she brought out the melodic lines clearly. The fast and exotic movement *Manchega*, seemed to have the flavour a Mexican dance and Regina gave a tight, spirited and rhythmic performance. *Souvenirs d'Andalousie* is of course named after Andalucia and just oozes Spanishness.

George Gershwin's *Three Preludes* were premiered by the composer 1916 in New York City and demonstrate his characteristic style of piano writing. *Prelude I* features intense rhythm and energetic syncopation which Regina performed splendidly. *Prelude II*, has the feel of a blues but with dreamlike, shifting harmonies and *Prelude III* has a brash, lively feel which exudes the energy of 1920s New York. Regina seemed to enjoy performing this lively colourful music and the audience responded warmly. Her playing of the somewhat ungrammatical *I Got Rhythm* was typically lively, rhythmic and technically assured. It's said that Ira Gershwin, George's elder brother and lyric-writer found that writing the words for this melody was unusually difficult.

Astor Piazzolla was born in 1921 and became the world's best-known composer of tangos. He elevated this simple dance into an expressive art-form which incorporated elements of jazz and classical music. *Oblivion* was composed in 1982 and it's his most famous piece, with harmonic sophistication and a brooding sense of melancholy. Regina gave

a compelling performance of this surprisingly complex and expressive work. Her recital concluded with Piazzolla's *Libertango*, a lively and rhythmic number from 1974 which seems to capture the very spirit of Argentina.

As an encore, Regina chose the first movement of Beethoven's *Piano Sonata No. 14 in C sharp minor*. She gave a beautifully restrained performance, bringing out the melodies clearly

yet controlling the smooth reflective flow of the music. Back in 1852, the German music critic Ludwig Rellstab likened this musical effect to "moonlight shining upon Lake Lucerne", unwittingly creating the nickname by which the sonata has been known ever since. After the angular, vivid music of Piazzolla, the sublime Beethoven was in perfect contrast and made a pleasingly tranquil ending to an exhilarating concert.