

The Washington Post

MUSIC

By **Joseph McLellan**

March 12, 1990

Dmitri Hvorostovsky did not fulfill expectations Saturday afternoon in the Terrace Theater; he surpassed them.

Those who heard the young Russian baritone in both his American recitals found his performance in the Kennedy Center substantially better than his March 4 performance of the same program at Lincoln Center in New York. One reason is that he was visibly less nervous, particularly in the nine Tchaikovsky songs that formed the first half of the program. Another is that the Terrace Theater is a much better hall for vocal music than Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall.

Hvorostovsky had considerably more stage presence in the intimate Terrace environment; the sense of communication with the audience was more complete, and his gestures seemed more spontaneous, confident and natural. Although he reportedly was suffering from a slight cold, his voice sounded better throughout the program -- particularly at the beginning when it seemed more completely warmed up. After the first few numbers, and the enthusiastic audience reaction, he began to welcome the applause with an ear-to-ear grin.

He had been magnificent in New York, of course, but the Terrace audience heard the performance of a lifetime. In a sense, it is a pity that efforts to have him sing in the Opera House (for about five times as many people) did not work. But from the viewpoint of art, rather than economics, the Terrace was the right place for this event. The (quite justifiable) size of his fee makes future appearances there unlikely, but the special quality of the experience might justify bringing him back at a higher-than-usual ticket price.

The Terrace recital was a triumph for Hvorostovsky and his pianist, Oleg Boshniakovich -- a partner of the highest caliber, not a mere "accompanist" -- but it was much more. It bolstered the prestige of the Kennedy Center, which recently has been missing some of the higher-priced foreign visitors to the United States, such as the Vienna Philharmonic. Above all, it was a substantial achievement for Francis Rizzo, artistic adviser at Wolf Trap and one of the world's great vocal talent scouts, who devoted months of work and intercontinental travel to arranging and publicizing the recitals, plus Hvorostovsky's televised appearance with Pavarotti next November and a performance tentatively scheduled for Wolf Trap this summer (though possibly not on June 30 as previously announced). Without Rizzo's effort, Hvorostovsky would still be nothing but an exotic name to American music-lovers.

For months, Rizzo has been telling critics and impresarios that Hvorostovsky's debut is the most important since Pavarotti's, and Saturday's recital more than justified that seemingly exorbitant claim. In his one Verdi number (Rodrigo's death from "Don Carlo," sung as an encore),

Hvorostovsky's voice opened up perceptibly beyond what he had used in his Russian repertoire, and the style and emotional communication were at least equal to Pavarotti's.

The songs of Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff, which made up the entire formal program, are not heard nearly often enough in this country, though a few of them are familiar in old-fashioned translations under such titles as "None but the lonely heart" and "O, cease thy singing, maiden fair." In Hvorostovsky's interpretation, the emotional depth and intensity of these songs reached levels unparalleled in my experience, while the purely musical quality -- the richness of tone, subtlety of phrasing, dynamic range and breath control -- were astounding. On return visits, it would be good to hear more of this singer's Verdi, which should begin to appear on recordings before long. But whatever he chooses to sing, his return will be eagerly waited.