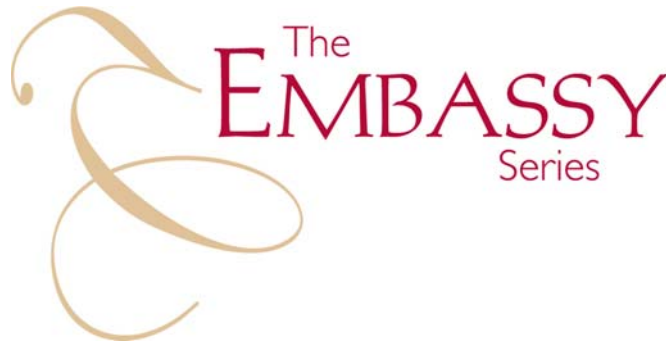


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Matthias Soucek

The elegant Viennese pianist Matthias Soucek returned to the Austrian Embassy Saturday night for his first Washington recital in two seasons. He played sonatas by Beethoven and Schubert, two Schubert impromptus, and three medleys: Liszt's ninth Hungarian Rhapsody, "Carnival at Pest"; a piece by the late pianist Friedrich Gulda called "Homage to Vienna"; and the program opener, Soucek's own "Homage to Mozart."

The latter began and ended with quotations from Mozart's variations on the theme known in English as "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" and moved through a succession of excerpts from several piano sonatas, seamlessly connected with characteristically Mozartean passage work. Soucek's obvious affinity for this music, not to mention his masterful grasp of late-18th-century keyboard style, raises the question: Why program a potpourri pieced together from favorite "Mozart moments" in lieu of a straight-forward presentation of one of the sonatas or great variation sets?

Soucek's viscerally exciting performance of Beethoven's "Waldstein" emphasized the score's vivid contrasts and rhythmic urgency. The Liszt rhapsody, perhaps garnished with more Viennese whipped cream than sharp Hungarian paprika, nevertheless showcased Soucek's ability to draw a spectrum of colors from the piano. In Schubert's Sonata in A, D. 664, the highlight of the evening, Soucek's beautiful singing style and unmannered delivery were captivating.

— Patrick Rucker