

Jay Harvey Upstage

Wednesday, March 2, 2016

Silver medalist Stefan Milenkovich returns in IVCI's Laureate Series in duo with accordionist Marko Hatlak



Marko Hatlak and Stefan Milenkovich

[Stefan Milenkovich](#) remains the youngest person ever designated a laureate in the history of the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis.

At 17, the Serbian-Italian violinist took the silver medal in the IVCI, and everyone was impressed with the teen's aplomb, interpretive vigor, and the fine finish of this artistry. He has progressed smoothly into an adult career, anchored a position as associate professor at the University of Illinois, and has developed a wide range of active musical interests.

One branch of those interests has placed him since 2011 in a musical partnership with [Marko Hatlak](#), a Slovenian accordionist who has also been his collaborator in tango ensembles.

Tango was the bedrock of a duo recital Hatlak and Milenkovich presented to a sold-out Cook Theater audience Tuesday evening at the Indiana Landmarks Center. As practiced by Astor Piazzolla under the designation "nuevo tango," the dance form evolved into a concert-ready genre.

This was demonstrated at this recital by the three-movement "History of Tango," which brought out Hatlak-Milenkovich's stylistic breadth in addition to their unvarying rapport and expert command of their instruments. The first movement had sort of sizing-each-other-up exchanges characteristic of the male bravado that apparently lies at the heart of street postures that evolved into tango.

The second movement was especially effective in showing how precise the duo could be in evoking the flexible tempo of "nuevo tango." There was lots of *ritenuto*, with coalescing in tempo as well as accelerating. Hatlak's supporting harmonies were effective in defining changes of mood. "Nightclub," the final movement, created a reflective late-night atmosphere, incorporating a vigorous middle section.

Piazzolla's "Oblivion" made for a haunting follow-up to the historical survey represented by the three-movement piece.

The duo began the recital as it ended it. The encore, "Siciliano" from J.S. Bach's Sonata No. 4 in C minor (originally for violin and harpsichord), gave ample evidence of the duo's poise and coordination. The sound of the accordion in the harpsichord part was not as much of a novelty as the use of a piano can be, particularly when played on the verge of eccentricity as it is in the old Jaime Laredo/Glenn Gould recording of these Bach sonatas.

Beginning the second half, each musician had a solo turn. Hatlak's French musette had virtuoso dash throughout. The left hand skated over the keyboard in fast triplet rhythms, while the right commanded the buttons to provide a bass line that ventured up and down in orderly fashion. Milenkovich played a classic display piece, Fritz Kreisler's "Recitativo and Scherzo," with a keen sense of drama in the first part and irrepressible brio in the scherzo. His tone was evenly produced, with seamless bowing and flexible dynamics.

A highlight after intermission was a showcase for Hatlak, a Macedonian "Gypsy Song" that the accordionist also sang, inviting audience participation in a simple, repetitive refrain. Vittorio Monti's "Czardas," perhaps the "greatest hit" among representatives of that Hungarian genre, was treated to piquant, sometimes amusing variations by the duo. After elaboration of the introductory material, it was off to the races, with plenty of agility on display from both men.

Before the encore, Milenkovich and Hatlak played "Taraf" by Richard Galliano, a wondrous exhibition of precision virtuosity and blithe energy that left the capacity crowd overjoyed.