Acclaimed Russian-American classical pianist performs August 9

HANOVER, NH—Pianist Vladimir Feltsman experienced the heights and depths of the Soviet Union’s treatment of its artists before emigrating to the West in 1987. Out of that rigor and repression, he has carved a reputation as one of the most versatile and constantly interesting musicians of our time.

Upper Valley audiences get to experience Feltsman’s consummate musicianship firsthand when he gives a concert in the Hop’s Spaulding Auditorium on Friday, August 9, at 8 pm, playing music by Haydn, Schubert, Liszt and Scriabin.

MusicWeb-International called him “sovereign over every idiom he plays and records...up there with the likes of Sokolov, Volodos, Kissin, Pollini, Zimerman, Perahia...Pires and Argerich... . Feltsman is now surely in his mature prime.”

Wrote The Philadelphia Inquirer, “He plays a piano as though he is speaking through it. And he has a lot to say... . Rarely do I spend so much time at the edge of my seat.”

In concert, wrote The Chicago Tribune, “His big hands took the awkward melodic leaps, rapid hand-crossings and torrential chordal volleys without breaking a sweat. The long first movement cadenza emerged as both weighty and propulsive.”

Feltsman’s Hop program offers ample opportunity to experience the range of his power and expression at the keyboard: Sonata No. 31 in A-flat Major, by Haydn, dominated by graceful lyricism and ornamented by sparkling scales and arpeggios; Sonata in A minor, D. 537, by Schubert, alternately stormy and serene; Ballade No. 2 in B minor, S.171, by Liszt, imbued with a sense of storytelling, song-like melodies and fantastic, dramatic effects; Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude (from Harmonies poétiques et religieuses, S. 173), by Liszt, consider one of the composer’s finest piano works; and Vers la flamme (Poème), Op. 72, by Scriabin, with a simple melody around which unusual harmonies and technically challenging tremolos create an intense, fiery luminance.

The first part of Feltsman’s life illustrates the challenges artists faced in Soviet Russia. A child prodigy and the privileged son of an enormously successful popular composer, he debuted with the Moscow Philharmonic at
age 11, in 1963. Six years later, he entered the Moscow Tchaikovsky State Conservatory of Music, one of that nation’s two leading conservatories in Soviet times and in the present. He also studied conducting at both the Moscow and Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) conservatories. In 1971, he won the Grand Prix at the Marguerite Long International Piano Competition in Paris; extensive touring throughout the Soviet Union, Europe and Japan followed this.

In 1979, because of his growing discontent with the restrictions on artistic freedom under the Soviet regime, Feltsman applied for an exit visa. "It was an artistic, not political, decision," he told People magazine in 1988. "I didn't want to waste my best years in the struggle with ignorant people, having party apparatchiks tell me where and when I could play." The repercussions began immediately. Within a few hours, the state radio agency had been ordered to remove all copies of Feltsman's five recordings, which were never to be played again.

For the next two years, he played no concerts at all, and many of his legions of friends now avoided him. In 1981 the authorities began to relax their ban enough that he could play obscure outpost towns, where he performed in factories, shops and schools—the noise of the surroundings often drowning out, mercifully, the pitifully out-of-tune piano.

He was permitted to play in the American Embassy, with private audiences that included diplomats and the Western press. (These concerts weren’t without incident: one 1986 performance became a cause célèbre when it was found that several piano strings had been cut before the performance. The strings were repaired, and Feltsman played on.) The first real note of hope was sounded when then-U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz pressed for Feltsman’s release during a visit to Moscow. In 1987, out of the blue, Feltsman was asked to play in Moscow’s prestigious Tchaikovsky Hall. Several weeks later, the visas came through for Feltsman and his family.

Upon his arrival in the United States that year, Feltsman was warmly greeted at the White House, where he performed his first recital in North America. That same year, his debut at Carnegie Hall established him as a major pianist on the American and international scene. Since that time, his accomplishments have included a cycle of concerts of Bach’s major piano works, spanning four consecutive seasons (1992-1996) at the 92nd Street Y in New York; “Masterpieces of the Russian Underground,” an unprecedented survey of piano and chamber works by 14 different composers from Shostakovich to the present, at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in 2003; 2006 performances of all of the Mozart piano sonatas, in New York’s Mannes School of Music and New York University’s Tisch Center; and many appearances at the Ravinia Festival, the Aspen Music Festival, and other top venues in North and South America. In 2012 and 2013, he returned to Russia to work as a conductor with the “Moscow Virtuosi” and the St. Petersburg Philharmonic, and to perform in solo concerts and as an orchestra soloist in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

A dedicated educator, he holds the Distinguished Chair of Professor of Piano at the State University of New York, New Paltz; is a member of the piano faculty at the Mannes College of Music in New York City; and is the founder and Artistic Director of the International Festival-Institute PianoSummer at New Paltz, a three-week-long, intensive training program for advanced piano students that attracts major young talents from all over the world.
Founded in 1962, the Hopkins Center for the Arts is a multi-disciplinary academic, visual and performing arts center dedicated to uncovering insights, igniting passions, and nurturing talents to help the Dartmouth community engage imaginatively and contribute creatively to our world. Each year the Hop presents more than 300 live events and films by visiting artists as well as Dartmouth students and the Dartmouth community, and reaches more than 22,000 Upper Valley residents and students with outreach and arts education programs. During the 2012-13 season, the Hop celebrates its 50th anniversary with heightened programming that emphasizes the Hop’s missions of mentoring young artists, supporting the development of new work, and providing a laboratory for participation and experimentation in the arts. The Hop’s 50th celebration is one of the major elements in Dartmouth’s designation of 2012-13 as the college’s Year of the Arts.

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CALENDAR LISTING:
Vladimir Feltsman, piano
Since emigrating to the West from Soviet Russia in 1987, Vladimir Feltsman has built a reputation, tackling big works from Baroque to the 21st-century with “a stainless-steel technique...lucidly elegant” (Chicago Classical Review). At the Hop, he performs Haydn’s Sonata No. 31 in A-flat Major, Schubert’s Sonata in A minor, D. 537, Liszt’s Ballade No. 2 in B minor, S.171 and Bénéédiction de Dieu dans la solitude (from Harmonies poétiques et religieuses, S. 173), and Scriabin’s Vers la flamme (Poéme), Op. 72. “Quite simply an amazing pianist!” (The New York Times).
Friday, August 9, 8 pm
Spaulding Auditorium, Hopkins Center for the Arts, Hanover NH
Tickets $20 & $30; Dartmouth students $10; 18 & under $17 & $19
Information: Hopkins Center Box Office, 603.646.2422 or hop.dartmouth.edu

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