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## Titanic pianist possessed by Prokofiev

### REVIEW

Roger Woodward, piano  
City Hall Concert Hall  
Friday, August 30  
By HARRY ROLNICK

**W**EARING a Lisztian coiffure, plaid shirt and with an Australian amble, Roger Woodward strolled out to the piano last night and was almost a man possessed.

Because Woodward has good sense, as well as a demonic mastery of Prokofiev, the possession never became a mania last night. But finally — finally! — Hongkong woke up to the fact that this is a Prokofiev birth centenary. The fact that the two hours of Prokofiev piano music was celebrated by this titanic Australian pianist made it all worthwhile.

Woodward offered no compromises with his selections. The *Three Oranges* march was an old friend, while the *Seventh Sonata* and *Tocatta* were familiar. But most of his works were rare and challenging, and revealed a composer of almost literally manic dimensions.

Otherwise, this was a world of revelation. One of the Prokofiev *Etudes* had the boogie-woogie rhythm of a Fats Waller and the metre of a Gerard Manley Hopkins.

The *Grandmother Tales* were almost naively lyrical. The *Tocatta* and *Etudes* seemed to begin with Schumannesque calm, only to rise up like Mount Pinatubo sizzling over the auditorium.

Roger Woodward was the man to play a whole evening full of Prokofiev. More frenetic pianists would simply wear out the listener with a single work. But Woodward is too great a musician for that.

His opening *Seventh Sonata*, then, was less sheer athleticism and

more a lesson in fluid construction. The opening was sober, tense, neither the *inquieto* or the *andantino* section played with any exaggeration.

The second movement had a poetry that was genuinely moving.

As for that Prokofiev finale, when the composer specifies *precipitato*, one must prepare to jump headlong from a massive musical precipice.

It was the *Visions Fugitive* that was almost exasperating. Not a single work is more than a minute long. Yet to refer to "Weberian brevity", as the otherwise sprightly programme-writer did, would be misleading. These aren't mathematical. They gleam with mystic bells, they imitate harps, they come close to an almost schmaltzy cocktail piano and take a sudden verge to the incomprehensible.

Woodward played them as Pro-

kofiev might have written them. He was carried away by each one, changed moods and left a memory of strange sudden inspirations.

Those final *Sarcasms* are rarely played. Not because they are simply demonically difficult, but because they are *naasty* pieces. They grunt, and moan, they shout and snarl, they wildly spit out at the audience. Needless to say, under Roger Woodward's fingers, even the ugliest *Sarcasm* had a lapidary — and daringly wicked — gleam.