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ARTS DIVERSIONS

Clarice hosts renowned Pittsburgh pianist Awadagin Pratt

Freelance Reporter · 10 hours ago

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Awadagin Pratt performed in the Gildenhorn Recital Hall in The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center on April 2, 2023. (Photo courtesy of The Clarice website)

By Chris Barylick
For The Diamondback

Awadagin Pratt entered the Gildenhorn Recital Hall in The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center Sunday afternoon, dressed in a dark blue and silver shirt and traditional black pants, his long black and gray dreadlocks extending down to the middle of his back.

He calmly approached the grand piano and spoke briefly as he thanked the audience for coming out and to consider the interludes between the songs on his setlist — which would be played without pausing, as a meditation.

He didn't have to say much throughout the afternoon. His music spoke for him.

Pratt tapped into his 51 years of musical experience, starting with pieces from Philip Glass' Glassworks before lunging into François Couperin's "Les Barricades Mystériuses." He then took on works from Fred Hersch, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Frédéric Chopin and Pyotr Tchaikovsky — it was more than 40 minutes of continuous playing.

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"I really loved it," Wentao Guo, a computer science doctoral student at the University of Maryland, said. "It was definitely one of my favorite concerts that I've seen at the Clarice so far, and I've seen a whole bunch of them."

Throughout the concert, Pratt alternated between looking down, intensely focusing on the keys and rolling his head and neck back, swaying with the music. Throughout the performance, he was nearly slinging his torso over the keys as he played them with such a force — almost frantic at times. Yet he was still seemingly in control, occasionally tapping his foot to match the music.

He performed Hersch's "Nocturne for Left Hand Alone" from Three Character Studies using only one hand. The feat amazed the audience, especially with a song that would have been plenty for a player using both hands.

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"I was so impressed by how different the pieces were, how beautifully the transitions were made. I was impressed by the left hand piece," Marie Fetter, a Hyattsville resident, said. "It's inspiring me too … I just retired and I'm thinking, 'I need to get the piano tuned, and I need to start playing again.'"

Pratt concluded with Franz Liszt's Piano Sonata in B minor followed by a standing ovation from the crowd.
"I thought it was mind-blowing," Damascus resident Nancy Nyland said. "Just the idea, the way he restructured the whole first half, and I wasn't really convinced at first. But then as he went through, you can start to sort of see the logic of it. It was just wonderful."

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