Faculty pianist in the running for Grammy nomination

Jeline Abutin, Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, November 3, 2015 7:00 am

Nadia Shpachenko, a classical pianist and an assistant professor at Cal Poly Pomona’s Department of Music, has had success with her world premiere CD, “Woman at the New Piano,” which was recorded in 2013.

Six-time Grammy nominees Marina and Victor Ledin produced the collaborative album that showcases a collection of classical piano and toy piano works composed by Tom Flaherty, James Matheson, Adam Schoenberg and Peter Yates (who is currently a professor at CPP’s Department of Music).

“She’s definitely devoted to her work,” said Teresa Kelly, the Department of Music’s publicist. “She’s like a whirlwind. She never stops. She’ll just go and go. She’s always practicing and teaching. She’s definitely motivated and brings that to the students here and inspires them.”

This month, “Woman at the New Piano” was awarded three gold medals from the Global Music Awards in three categories: album, classical pianist and composition/composer.

“I’m very proud of this album,” said Shpachenko. “It’s been a labor of love; I worked so hard on it. I collaborated with all of the composers who wrote music specifically for it. It’s been a dream collaboration. They were all wonderful to work with. They wrote what they consider some of their best pieces for my project.”

The album was also chosen and submitted by Reference Recordings, Shpachenko’s record label, to be considered for a Grammy nomination. It has recently made it onto the ballot for the 58th Annual Grammy Awards.

“Right now, [The] Recording Academy members are mailing in their ballots to indicate their nomination choices,” said Shpachenko. “Five albums or tracks, depending on the category, out of numerous albums will be nominated. Some categories could have thousands of submissions. It’s a very competitive process. I’m hopeful; this is my first time being in the Grammy process.”

“I think all her accomplishments are well deserved,” said Matt Borgialli, a student of Shpachenko’s for five years and a sixth-year chemical engineering and music performance student. “Just because we see her everyday, she’s our friend and our teacher. We don’t think of her as this enormous figure in contemporary music, but it’s a nice reminder. It’s a reminder of the high caliber of a player she is.”
In addition to the awards, Shpachenko has performed numerous recitals, the most recent being the Piano Spheres at the REDCAT’s Satellite Series at the Walt Disney Concert Hall on Oct. 27. During her performance, she played pieces from “Woman at the New Piano” as well as two world premieres by Lewis Spratlan and Annie Gosfield.

Although each piece is highly regarded and loved by Shpachenko, James Matheson’s piece, “Cretic Variations,” takes the pianist’s breath away every time she plays it.

“Last night, I played it at REDCAT, and it’s such an experience when you play it,” said Shpachenko. “It has a very beautiful and touching ending, slow ending. It has a huge range of emotions; [it] sort of explodes in the middle. It has this big climax and very touching last section that just gets you into this incredible mood that makes you in touch with all the dear and tender things.”

Creating “Woman at the New Piano” was not an easy task for Shpachenko, who spent four days recording at night up until 5 a.m. However, it was a fulfilling and life-changing experience for her, she said.

“There’s so much work that goes into every single step of the process with recording an album like this,” said Shpachenko. “Months and months of planning, … then four days of recording sessions, … a whole year of productions, listening to all the takes, deciding what to choose for the final product, working with the label on everything from graphics to program notes, just every little aspect takes a lot of work and there are many decisions to make.”

Shpachenko started playing piano at the age of five. Her mother, a piano teacher, would teach lessons at their home.

“I just sat and listened,” said Shpachenko. “I played many different instruments, but I always wanted to be a pianist. That was always my passion; it was my dream.”

Since her childhood, Shpachenko started to focus and build her career as a classical pianist by performing, entering competitions and studying piano performance as an undergraduate and graduate student.

“I didn’t really know what a career of a pianist was like when I was little,” said Shpachenko. “I just loved to play, and I loved to perform. I always loved performing. For me, performing gives me such positive energy and such great feeling: I just love connecting with the audiences and sharing my music with people who come to my concerts. I didn’t know at that time, when I was young girl, what all this would be like, but it’s definitely a rewarding career.”