



At 15, Miami cellist is on the road to success

By Lawrence Budmen

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As the Miami Symphony Orchestra rehearses Dvorak's Cello Concerto the soloist sways to the music, carefully eyeing the conductor's beat and dynamics. This is a standard part of the process of preparing an orchestral performance except that the soloist in this Mount Olympus of cello concertos is fifteen-year-old Anna Litvinenko. The tenth-grade student at Miami's New World School of the Arts High School will perform the Dvorak concerto Saturday night with conductor Eduardo Marturet and the Miami Symphony.

Litvinenko is unfazed by the daunting challenges of a work championed by such legends as Pablo Casals, Gregor Piatigorsky, Mstislav Rostropovich and Yo-Yo Ma. “It is the most beautiful piece ever written,” she says. “I could not believe the sheer romance and yearning of the second and third movements. It makes you dig deep inside when playing.”

Miami Symphony Orchestra music director Marturet is similarly enthusiastic about his youthful soloist’s talent. “When I first heard Anna three years ago, I immediately noted an outstanding, unique young artist,” he said. Marturet invited her to join the orchestra’s cello section at age twelve as the first recipient of the group’s Outstanding Young Artist program. In the summer of 2008, Litvinenko performed Tchaikovsky’s Variations on a Rococo Theme under Marturet’s baton with the Sinfonica Juvenil Teresa Carreno in Caracas, part of Venezuela’s acclaim El Sistema youth orchestra program.

The Ukrainian-born Litvinenko is the child of a multicultural musical family. Her father Konstantin Litvinenko, a native of the Ukraine, is principal cellist of the Miami Symphony and a former music teacher in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Her mother, a pianist, was born in Cuba and studied at the Odessa Conservatory.

Although her parents are now divorced, Litvinenko continues to study primarily with her father and credits her parents with her passion for music. Her mother began teaching her piano at age four while her father would screen videos for her of great cellists. “The cello took over. At age seven, I found my passion,” Litvinenko says enthusiastically. By the time she was in third grade, she was playing a Haydn cello concerto and Monti’s Czardas as party pieces.

Litvinenko studies weekly with Aaron Merritt, a former member of the New World Symphony, at the New World School. Merritt felt she was already a “seasoned musician” when she auditioned for him while still an eighth grader. “She is working to develop musical colors and a more natural sound,” Merritt notes. He feels she is “amazingly well groomed with a maturity level that allows her to absorb and listen objectively.”

She already had a trial run at the first movement of the Dvorak concerto when she performed with the New World Symphony at the annual side-by-side concert last spring as winner of the orchestra’s concerto competition. New World conducting fellow Edward Abrams, who led the performance, was tremendously impressed. “When she auditioned, after tuning quietly, she produced this enormous sound right from the concerto’s opening phrase. It was stunning. We were shocked and blown away,” Abrams related.

Carina Voly, the orchestral academy’s director of outreach, added “It was a pleasure to listen to Anna. She was so well prepared and professional.” Voly was so enthusiastic that she arranged for Litvinenko to receive a New World sponsored fellowship to study at the Aspen Festival. Ultimately the cellist declined the offer and elected to spend the

summer at the famous Meadowmount School for Strings in upstate New York, studying with Hans Jorgen Jensen. Voly indicated that there is great probability that the Aspen opportunity will be offered to Litvinenko again.

Litvinenko's musical tastes are catholic. She lists Cuban music, the Beatles, piano music of Chopin, Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky, string quartets by Debussy and Ravel and the classic jazz of Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald as her favorite listening. Far from considering the Dvorak concerto the top of the mountain, she wants to learn the Elgar and Shostakovich concertos and sonatas by Kodaly, Poulenc, Franck, Shostakovich and Debussy.

Litvinenko's dream is to have a solo career. "It is a whole different world to be a soloist and I enjoy every minute of it," but she quickly adds "I would not mind being part of an orchestra." Marturet has no doubt about her future. "Anna is a terrific artist," he proclaims. "She will have a very special career. She has the chops, charisma and personality."

Anna Litvinenko plays Dvorak's Cello Concerto with Eduardo Marturet and the Miami Symphony Orchestra 8 p.m. Saturday at the Lincoln Theater in Miami Beach. For tickets and information, call 305-275-5666 or www.miamisymphony.org.