



Irena
PORTENKO

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biography

Ukrainian-born Irena Portenko first displayed love and talent for the piano at age three and by age eight, debuted as soloist with the Ukrainian National Orchestra, performing Haydn's Concerto in D Major. Praised for her "**diligent, tender, and sparkling virtuosity...**" (Ukrainian Weekly, 2000) Ms. Portenko's distinguished array of concerto performances, recitals, festival appearances and recognitions at international competition has garnered impressive accolades from both audiences and critics throughout Europe and North America, granting her a career of international status.

In June 2012, Ms. Portenko performed Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto in a series of concerts, with Maestro Uwe Harrer conducting. Shortly upon the last performance, which took place in the area of Linz, The Upper Austrian Newspaper noted: "**...The highlight of the evening was Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 in B Flat Minor, performed with excellence by Irena Portenko, USA and Russian trained pianist. Effortlessly did she play this much loved composition with its typical resonances; using a sparkingly rapid technique while giving full range of intimate emotional expression.**"

Frequenting the stage often, Irena Portenko has appeared as a soloist with orchestras in the United States and Europe. She has performed under the batons of Kenneth Kiesler, Rossen Milanov, Volodymyr Sirenko and Allin Vlasenko, to name just a few. In addition to her recital and solo work, Ms. Portenko is an avid chamber musician, and has appeared in that capacity with distinguished artists in the Ukraine, Russia, Germany, France, Italy, and the United States.

Her passion for collaborating with and performing the music of contemporary composers has led her to interpretations of numerous works by living American and Ukrainian composers. She premiered Israel Kremen's Twenty Five Preludes and Fugues for Piano and Humankind (2009), "**...which shines with wit, originality, and craft...**" (The American Record Guide, 2012) and Triptych "Venetian Blinds" for solo piano by Michael Daugherty (2003), which was recognized by Mark Stryker of the Detroit Free Press as "**...the most powerful work on the program...**" Mr. Stryker went on to say, "**Pianist Irena Portenko's exciting reading unlocked the music's technical challenges.**"

Upon an invitation from Artist International, Ms. Portenko's gave a critically acclaimed debut at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall featuring a performance of Frédéric Chopin's complete 24 Études, prompting Anthony Tommasini, reporting for the New York Times, to write: "**Her playing was admirably honest and clear-textured... Ms. Portenko pulled off a feat that puts her in a select company.**"

As a recording artist, Ms. Portenko released a CD of Chopin's Études on the Blue Griffin Label, which was met with significant critical praise from such outlets as Fanfare Magazine, for which Dave Seaman

wrote: "**[I] listened to Portenko's CD four times before writing this review, and each time found new subtleties to enjoy... it is a product of a distinctive voice and a fine temperament. Her interpretation develops the cycle's continuity with considerable success.**"

London's Music & Vision Daily echoed the approval, commending Ms. Portenko's "**enviable ease... fluidity of touch and tone...**" (Robert Anderson). The CD continues to receive airplay nationwide in the United States, and was the August 2010 "Choice CD" on WCLV, praised by the radio's on-air personality Bill O'Connell as an "**enormous undertaking, a pianistic high-wire act-to say the least!**"

Among frequent awards and recognitions, Ms. Portenko has been awarded prizes at numerous international solo, concerto and chamber music competitions throughout the U.S., Ukraine and France, including the National Prokofiev Competition, Golden Autumn Chamber Music Competition (both in Ukraine), Pierre Lantier Competition (France) and Young Artist Competition (2002, Ann Arbor, MI)

A respected educator, Irena Portenko has adjudicated the Solo Piano and Chamber Music Competition Art of the 21st Century (Kiev, Ukraine, 2004 and 2006). She presented lectures and performed at the College Music Society (Wilkes-Barre, PA and Princeton, NJ), MENC (Mansfield, PA), the World Piano Conferences (Novi Sad, Serbia), and at the Interharmony Music Festival (Sulzbach-Rosenberg, Germany and Arcidosso, Italy).

Irena Portenko holds Doctoral and Master's degrees in Piano Performance from the University of Michigan, and a Post-Graduate degree in Collaborative Piano from the Ukrainian National Academy of Music. Her teachers include such renowned artists as Yong Hi Moon, Logan Skelton, Igor Ryabov, Liudmila Tsvirko, Ralph Votapek and Arthur Greene. Currently Dr. Portenko resides in New York area where she shares her passion for music as a piano teacher and freelance musician.



Photo: Anthony Ficalora

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performance & CD's reviews

"So it was well worth attending the recital by the pianist Irena Portenko, who holds degrees from the Kiev Conservatory in her native Ukraine and a doctorate from the University of Michigan, at Weill Recital Hall on Saturday, presented by Artists International. Ms. Portenko played through Chopin's études with a relaxed and resourceful technique.

...her playing was admirably honest and clear-textured...Ms. Portenko pulled off a feat that puts her in a select company."

Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times Published: June 8, 2009

"...The highlight of the evening was Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 in B Flat Minor, performed with excellence by Irena Portenko, USA and Russian trained pianist. Effortlessly did she play this much loved composition with its typical resonances; using a sparkingly rapid technique while giving full range of intimate emotional expression."

Upper Austrian Newspaper, June 5th, 2012

"Once again Ravel and this time with Irena Portenko at the piano with selections from "Le Tombeau de Couperin". And here the artist magically displayed her musical contribution and with a natural effortless touch she played the broken chord changes with an elegance, an almost impish exhilaration utilizing the format of a classical structurally oriented Fugue with momentum, a continually rising musical dynamic - that was simply superbly played."

Sulzbach-Rosenberg, Germany Published: August, 2011

"A heroic effort, these well-recorded complete etudes are a mark of a superior talent paying homage to Chopin's 200th anniversary. Her inscription of the complete Chopin Etudes (15-16 July 2009) in the Steinway D testifies to a polished artist working well within the Romantic milieu. Portenko's spans, her steady pulsation, her liquid phrasing, bespeak a long familiarity with the Chopin style."

Gary Lemco, Audiophile Audition Published: August 16, 2010

"Portenko has the easy fluidity of touch and tone that can simulate the sound of keyboard instruments made during Chopin's lifetime. The Etudes are designed as technical challenges, each of which is met with enviable ease."

Robert Anderson (London, UK), Music & Vision Published: August, 2010

"Ukrainian-born Irena Portenko...is apparently fearless. This disc comes on the heels of her highly successful performance of the same program at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall, where she received a standing ovation."

Bill O'Connell, The August 2010 Choice CD Blog WCLV Classical FM Published: August, 2010

"When a young pianist programs both sets on her New York recital debut, it indicates great courage and raises great expectations.

It is a pleasure to report that the Ukrainian pianist Irena Portenko amply fulfilled those expectations. After announcing that she was dedicating the recital to "the loving memory of her grandparents", she plunged into the cascading arpeggios of the first Etude with a sweeping energy which, though she was clearly still warming up, left no doubt that she was fully equal to the Etudes' most daunting demands. Ms. Portenko met all their challenges with admirable ease and aplomb. Her sound was sonorous and powerful without getting harsh, and she achieved high speeds without seeming rushed."

Edith Eisler, New York Concert Review Inc. Published: June 6, 2009

"The most powerful work on the program happened to be for solo piano — "Venetian Blinds," which was recently premiered at an Italian contemporary-music festival. About 12 minutes long, the piece alternates soft, muted chords and suspiciously trembling bass notes with thrilling outbursts, furious glissandos up and down the keyboard and rapid trills; I thought of a love child of Charles Ivés and Liberace. An abstract veneer kept melting into primary-colored harmony, melody and form, but the shadings of light and dark — Daugherty said he was thinking of film noir - informed the music with a mystery and depth lacking in other works on the program. Pianist Irena Portenko's exciting reading unlocked the music's technical challenges."

Mark Stryker, Detroit Free Press Published: October 25, 2003

continued...



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performance & CD's reviews

continued...

"Irena Portenko congenially accompanied the Lieder and showed later in the program that she is a soloist of great depth in her understanding of "Papa" Haydn. She sharpened again his Sonata in F Dur HOB XVI:23 to a spirited, humorous glistening musical precious gem and with a depth in the Adagio which shouldn't be excluded. Because she went after and felt the small nuances, the contrasts of rhythm, articulation and movement that give its own communicating character, this music, historically seen, the opportunistic work of a genius was raised to its immortal place."

Wolfgang G. P. Heinsch, Uffenheim, Germany. Published: January, 2011

"The concert was sold out even in this hall, considerably larger than the rest of the places. Appearance of many music lovers proved that the decision to move the concert to this venue was right. The concert was opened by Irena Portenko on the piano. She presented three different pieces, where they showed their versatility and expressiveness, always reflected in her play through gestures and facial expressions. Searching for the perfect tone, with her whole body felt in harmony with the sounds that bubbled from the piano."

Sulzbach-Rosenberg, Germany Published: August, 2010

"Portenko has the easy fluidity of touch and tone that can simulate the sound of keyboard instruments made during Chopin's lifetime. The Etudes are designed as technical challenges, each of which is met with enviable ease."

Robert Anderson (London, UK), Music & Vision Published: August, 2010

"Her etudes are as much an intellectual accomplishment as a technical one. The elucidation of multiple voices and counterpoint is one of the particular joys of Portenko's rendition. One of the particular joys of her interpretation is in seeing how the "personality" of individual etudes reflects the cycle's place in the history of piano composition I listened to Portenko's CD four times before writing this review, and each time I found new subtleties to enjoy. It is a product of a distinctive voice and a fine temperament."

David Saemann, Fanfare Magazine Published: Fall 2010



Photo: Hiroyuki Ito

TV Appearances

The Arts in Westchester

Interview with Irena Portenko before her Carnegie Hall debut.
<http://www.pctv76.org/show.php?epid=145>

"Kaleidoscope"

Program featuring Irena Portenko, Israel Kremen and Sergei Kvitko.
<http://www.pctv76.org/show.php?epid=963>

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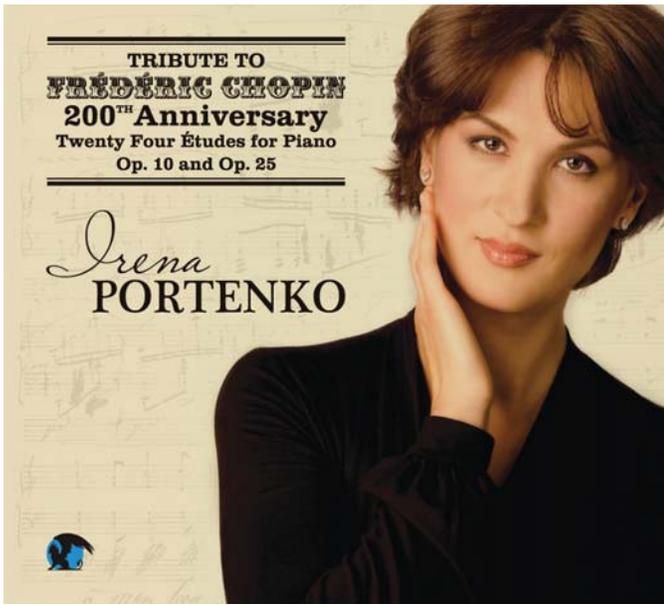
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discography



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TRIBUTE TO FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN 200TH ANNIVERSARY

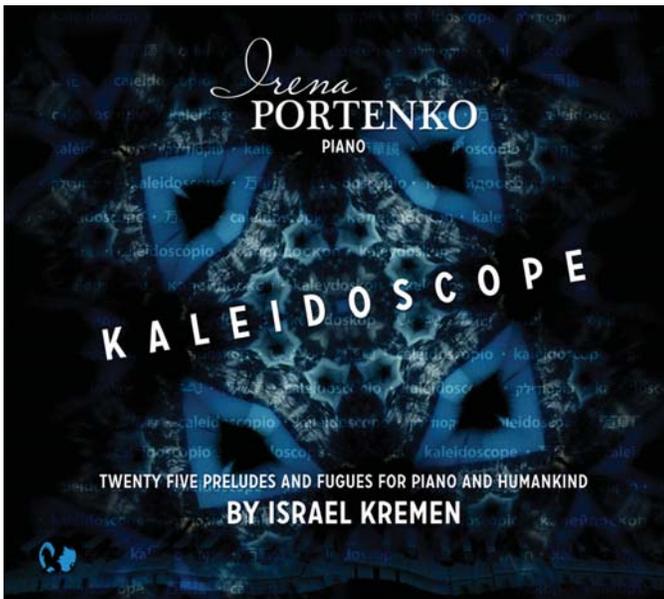
Twenty Four Études for Piano Op. 10 and Op. 25

"In the *Études*, which, in the first place were intended to become technical exercises, Frédéric Chopin approached his compositional method with enough sophistication to immediately raise its meaning to that of the concert miniature pieces. Each piece seems to open the world of its own character, mood or a scene. For me as a performer, the set of the *Études* appears as an unique example of individuality within continuity, reminiscent of an invisible thread with the gemstones -each with its own shining personality."

I. Portenko

Produced and engineered by Sergei Kvitko and recorded at Blue Griffin's Studio The Ballroom on July 15-16, 2009.

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KALEIDOSCOPE - BY ISRAEL KREMEN

Twenty Five Preludes And Fugues For Piano And Humankind

Representing a never-ending loop of ideas, emotions and styles that swirl in a relentless motion that is our life – Israel Kremen's KALEIDOSCOPE strives to unite all that is around us with an open-ended invitation to the listener to become a part of the performance, as the intriguing title suggests.

Brought to life by acclaimed Ukrainian-born pianist Irena Portenko and the attending audience in Pittsburgh in 2009, this is a live recording of the original, highly-successful, world-premiere performance. As called for in the instrumentation, the participation of "humankind" is vital, and can be heard in the original concert as the audience claps, whistles and sings along with Portenko. The performance stands as a fruit of a close and diligent collaboration between composer and performer.

Unique and daring in its vision and stylistic scope, KALEIDOSCOPE is both virtuosic and accessible. Much like the beloved toy of wonder, it brings forth a myriad of styles, juxtaposed in a seemingly endless, multidimensional world.

Recorded live at PNC Recital Hall, Mary Pappert School of Music Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA on October 25th, 2009 under supervision by Tom Haas · Produced and mastered by Sergei Kvitko

Executive production by eidon products & services GmbH (www.eidon.de)

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repertoire

Solo repertoire

J.S. Bach

Fantasy and Fugue in a minor BWV 904
Fantasy and Fugue in a minor BWV 944
Selected Preludes and Fugues

L. van Beethoven

Sonata Op. 110
Sonata Op. 10 # 3
Sonata Op. 57
Sonata Op. 31 # 2
Sonata Op. 31 # 3

J. Brahms

Paganini Variations Op. 35

F. Chopin

Twenty Four Etudes for Piano Op. 10 and Op. 25
Polonaise-Fantasy in A flat Major
Sonata # 2 in b flat minor Op. 35
Sonata # 3 in b minor Op. 52
Fantasy in f minor

M. Daugherty

Venetian Blinds for Solo Piano

S. Gubaidulina

Ciacona

J. Ibert

Ten Stories for Piano

I. Kremen

Twenty Five Preludes and Fugues

F. Liszt

Sonata in b minor
Six Etudes Apres Paganini
Mazeppa
Selected piano pieces

M. Mussorgsky

Pictures at an Exhibition

S. Prokofiev

Sonata # 2 in d minor Op. 14
Sonata # 3 in a minor Op. 28
Sonata # 7 in B flat Major Op. 83
Sonata # 8 in B flat Major Op. 84
Sonata # 9 in C Major Op. 94

S. Rachmaninoff

Sonata # 2 in b flat minor Op. 36 (revised version)
Variations on a Theme by Corelli Op. 42
Selected Etudes and Preludes

M. Ravel

Le Tombeau de Couperin

A. Scriabin

Selected Etudes from Op. 8 and Op. 42
Sonata # 2
Sonata # 5
Two Poèmes Op. 32

D. Shostakovich

Twenty Four Preludes Op. 34
Selected Preludes and Fugues

V. Silvestrov

Sonata # 1 for piano



Photo: Anthony Ficalora

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repertoire

Concerti repertoire

J.S. Bach

Keyboard Concerto in d minor

S. Barber

Piano Concerto Op. 38

L. van Beethoven

Piano Concerto # 1 in C Major Op. 15

Piano Concerto # 2 in B flat Major Op. 19

Piano Concerto # 3 in c minor Op. 37

Piano Concerto # 4 in G Major Op. 58

J. Brahms

Piano Concerto # 1 in d minor Op. 15

J. Corigliano

Piano Concerto

E. Grieg

Piano Concerto in a minor Op. 16

F. Mendelssohn

Piano Concerto # 1 in g minor Op. 25

Piano Concerto # 2 in d minor Op. 40

W.A. Mozart

Piano Concerto in d minor K.466

Piano Concerto in c minor K. 491 (Cadenza by A. Schnittke)

Piano Concerto in E flat Major K.271

Piano Concerto in A Major K. 488

S. Prokofiev

Piano Concerto # 1 in D flat Major Op. 10

Piano Concerto # 2 in g minor Op. 16

Piano Concerto # 3 in C Major Op. 26

S. Rachmaninoff

Piano Concerto # 1 in f sharp minor Op. 1

Piano Concerto # 2 in c minor Op. 18

Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini Op. 43

C. Saent-Saëns

Piano Concerto # 2 in g minor

D. Shostakovich

Piano Concerto # 1 in C Major

Piano Concerto # 2 Op. 102 in F Major

P. Tchaikovsky

Piano Concerto #1 Op. 23 in b flat minor



Photo: Anthony Ficalora

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program samples

I enjoy discussing the possible repertoire for my performances. I, as well, think of programming often, mainly due to the fact that, as your musical “tour guide”, I would like to invite my audience to experience the journey that I have lived through myself. Therefore, below you will find samples of various programming ideas based on thematic, characteristic or contrasting principles. I hope you will find them interesting and well-matching to the needs of your event.

Cruise on the Blue Danube...

J. Haydn - Sonata Hob XVI:23
Schubert-Liszt - Transcriptions
A. Berg - Piano Sonata Op. 1
J. Brahms - Variations on a Theme by Paganini Op. 35

From Russia with love...

D. Shostakovich - Selected Preludes and Fugues
S. Rachmaninoff - Sonata # 2 in b flat minor Op. 36
S. Prokofiev - Sonata in B flat Major Op. 84

A Gift of Fire

L. van Beethoven - Sonatas Op. 57 and Op. 110
A. Scriabin - Two Poèmes Op. 32
A. Scriabin - Selected Etudes Op. 1, 12 and 42
A. Scriabin - Sonatas # 2, # 5

Kaleidoscope

I. Kremen - Selected Preludes and Fugues
M. Daugherty - Venetian Blinds
V. Silvestrov - Sonata
T. Tanaka - Variations and Passacaglia on a Theme from The Magic Flute
M. Skoryk - Burlesque
S. Gubaidulina - Ciacona

Poetry for Piano

F. Chopin - Sonatas # 2 Op. 35 and # 3 Op. 52
F. Chopin - Etudes Op. 10 and Op. 25

Dance Rhythms of all Times by

J.S. Bach, F. Chopin, F. Schubert, M. Ravel, D. Shostakovich, B. Bartok,
A. Ginastera and A. Piazzolla.

Of Lands and People Far Away

B. Bartok - Rhapsodie
M. Ravel - Le Tombeau de Couperin
M. Mussorgsky - Pictures at an Exhibition



Photo: Robert Kim