

Volodin proved himself to be a master pianist

By WENNEKE SAVENIJE

In 1831, after he had heard Chopin playing for the first time, Schumann wrote "Hats off, gentlemen, a genius!". The young Russian pianist Alexei Volodin (1977), who gave his sublime debut recital in the series *Master pianists* at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam on Sunday, merits the same kind of reception.

Two major facts highlight the international breakthrough of Volodin: in 2003, he won the *Géza Anda Competition* in Zürich and in 2005, he conquered Paris with his debut recital at the *Théâtre des Champs-Élysées*. Recitals in Europe and America followed, as well as concerts with top-class conductors, such as Maazel, Chailly and Zinman. The young Russian is Gergiev's favourite pianist, with whom he plans to record all Beethoven concertos. Like Gergiev, Volodin is a free spirit, who lets himself be inspired and inebriated by the affection of the score.

Volodin only started to play the piano at the age of nine, but his vertiginous way of playing seems so effortless and natural that one falls into the conclusion that music must have been his mother tongue right from birth.

With his refined opening of Schubert's *Impromptu* No. 1, the young Russian enchanted the audience with his magical touch, evoking an unknown richness of timbres, from the very beginning. Volodin made Schubert flourish from the inside, as if it was a rare flower which – due to its tenderness – barely stands the daylight.

In Beethoven's *Sonata* No. 32 sweet crepuscular dreams gave up ground to a tumultuous and titanic battle against the elements. Especially the *Allegro con brio ed appassionato* sounded like a direful adventures story. On his divine wings, Volodin flew over the earthly drudgery and enlightened even the grimmest fugato passages with a touch of light-footed elegance.

In the spirit of the composer, Volodin played Rachmaninoff's *6 Moments musicaux Op. 16* with technical refinement and melancholic expressiveness, after which he ended tumultuously with an extremely vivid interpretation of Stravinsky's *Trois Mouvements de Pétrouchka*. In his Chopin, Rachmaninoff and Skrjabin encores, Volodin moved effortless between feathery melancholy and titanic passion, without lessening, not even for a single moment, his tremendous concentration on the musical essence.