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RAN DANK, *pianist*

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Ran Dank review - Kennedy Center Debut

Charles T. Downey
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Israeli-born, Juilliard-trained pianist Ran Dank made a splashy Washington debut on Saturday afternoon, presented by Washington Performing Arts Society in the Kennedy Center Terrace Theater. The originally announced program was almost identical to what he played when he won the Young Concert Artists auditions in New York last year. Instead, Dank returned to some of his choices for the 2009 Van Cliburn Competition, where he finished as a semifinalist, one of several jury decisions to be criticized that year.

Dank played with impeccable technical surety, a point made by a boisterous performance of Liszt's "Réminiscences de Norma" transcription, a piece hardly worth the trouble of busting one's chops to play it. Miles of gauzy scales, dizzying double octaves, and fluttering repeated-note chords -- Dank conquered them all.

Schumann's Piano Sonata No. 3 required almost as much technical pizzazz but was more profound, with Dank mastering the work's shifting moods -- chirping dotted rhythms, moments of rhapsody, explosive force and triumphant exultation.

Opening with Pierre Boulez's "Douze Notations" was a gutsy move at the Van Cliburn Competition, and it was just as disarming here. Dank switched gears quickly between these short, often acerbic pieces, and his ability to apply weight with his hands to create opulent voicing details created colors that ran from velvety and murmuring to muted and arid. There were many admirable ideas in his performance of Beethoven's Sonata in E-flat (Op. 27, No. 1), especially in realizing the composer's orchestral conception of the piano.