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Rising star Andrew Staupe shimmers with orchestra

By David Hawley

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The soloist with the Minnesota Orchestra this weekend is a hometown boy — pianist Andrew Staupe, a St. Paul native who won the orchestra’s WAMSO Young Artists Competition a few years ago and is working on a doctorate in music at the University of Minnesota.

It’s vicariously thrilling to witness a young musician’s debut with a top-tier orchestra. Staupe performed with the Minnesota Orchestra during a Sommerfest concert two years ago, but this is his first main subscription concert appearance — and there is a difference.

Staupe’s vehicle is Rachmaninoff’s First Piano Concerto, with all its thundering chordal passages, shimmering flourishes that seem endless and big double-octave hammering. In the first of four weekend performances, Staupe performed with great energy and confidence, showing superb technique and control.

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Staupe is a nonhistrionic performer, and this observation is meant as a compliment. A lean young man, he performs upright, with focused concentration. Unmistakable, however, was the sense of seeing a real musician at the starting gate. Judging by the shining moments displayed in Thursday’s performance, this is a career on the rise and a performer to watch.