NEW PALTZ — PianoSummer opened Saturday evening at SUNY New Paltz's McKenna Theatre with a "Faculty Gala," a concert by seven of the piano teachers who will be leading a group of 45 students for the next month. It culminates in the Jacob Flier prize and a concert on Aug. 3, with the winner playing with the Hudson Valley Philharmonic directed by the Institute/Festival founder Vladimir Feltsman. Now in its 18th year, the festival also features guest artists and recitals by past and present students.

Robert Roux led off the faculty program with a familiar piece, Bach's Prelude and Fugue No. 1 in C major from Book II of "The Well-Tempered Clavier." Flowing and crisp, the prelude sustains a lovely counterpoint that is rhythmically alert until the fugue races in with quick cadences and repeated motifs.


Robert Hamilton played Haydn's Sonata No. 58 in C major in two movements, the first a lyric andante and the second a lively rondo. The pianist made the most of the rests with dramatic loud chords and quiet pauses, handling the triple meters and the contrasts with authority and grace.

Schumann's "Drie Phantasiestucke," Op. 111 presents "three fantasy pieces" that pianist Phillip Kawin interpreted with rolling arpeggios and sensitive passagework. The first two movements offer fast and stormy chords that give way to serenity and sonorous calm.

After Franz Schubert's death, Liszt set some 60 of his lieder to solo piano. His "Love's Message" from "Swan Songs" features crosshanded scales evoking bubbling phrases and melodic lines. Playing by memory, Kawin brought feeling and skill to his lyrical reading of the score.

Unlike other soloists, Paul Ostrovsky used the printed score in playing Beethoven's Sonata in C minor, Op. 13, "Pathetique." He sacrificed none of his spontaneity in his performance, from the first resonant chords of the allegro to the adagio cantabile and the final rondo. Left-hand tremolos and right-hand melodies flew off the keys with dramatic verve and harmony in one of Beethoven's truly memorable works.

After intermission, Feltsman performed Liszt's "Benediction de Dieu dans la solitude" from "Harmonies poetique et religieuses." An extraordinary meditation, it is both powerful and spiritual in its swelling cadences and subtlety. Feltsman demonstrated his mastery in his supple nuances and emphatic expressionism, especially in the high range, proving again that he is one of the most accomplished pianists of this day.
Susan Starr brought her own bold attacks to Brahms' Scherzo in E-flat minor, Op. 4. Brash, rocking rhythms mark the flourishes of this early work, which Starr imbued with excitement in the double trios that drive the piece to its thunderous close with pedals to the floor.

More thunder was heard in Alexander Korsantia's rendering of Stravinsky's "Tango" and "Circus Polka." With impetuous energy, he wove the discordant chords of the tango into the polka's circus fireworks of marching beat and exploding measures in a cacophony of sound. Korsantia is a force of nature let loose at the keyboard.

For more information, call 257-3880 or visit www.newpaltz.edu/piano.