

## Joyce Yang

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# Love of music drives Van Cliburn winner

BY LIZ DAVIS

The Steinway piano sits center stage as the hall begins to fill with people in quiet anticipation.

Joyce Yang comes in, sees the video camera and cringes.

"I didn't know we were taping this," Yang said.

When she plays, she sways and closes her eyes completely absorbed in the moment and the melody she plays. At times her nose practically touches the keys. Others, she's leaning as far from the piano as the music dictates.

Yang puts so much force into her playing she throws her body into each note so that it appears she is bouncing on the bench.

Yang, who was awarded the silver medal in the Van Cliburn competition at age 19, returned to the Bass Performance Hall on Tuesday night for the first time since the competition.

Future pianists should play for the music, for themselves, not to impress, Yang said. They should play because the music moves them and they are inspired, she said.

"It's so important to keep music in our lives," Yang said. "To be part of that inspiration for other people, to feel something this strong, is amazing."

Tuesday morning before the concert at Bass Hall, Yang returned to TCU, gave a brief demonstration of her skills and participated in a question-and-answer session in the PepsiCo Recital Hall.

"It's a huge pressure to be back in Bass Hall by yourself," Yang said. "It's too big. The stage is too big. The hall is too big. It's just big."

The first piece she performed was Brahms' "Variations on a Theme by Paganini."

"Brahms Paganini variations are the most difficult pieces I try to play," she said, laughing. "It's so emotionally draining."

"I know I can play the challenging pieces," Yang said. "I just have to find it in me."

Luke Palan, a freshman criminal justice major, said during his survey of music class he studied the Van Cliburn competition and had to attend three concerts during the semester. Palan heard about Yang and decided to go to the concert.

"I enjoy listening to the piano," Palan said. "After watching the 2001 competition in class, (Yang) was everything I was expecting."

Yang said people always ask her when she fell in love with the piano. She always says she never fell in love with the piano, she fell in love with the music.

Yang said she will never reach the point where a piece can't get any better. One day she'll know exactly what she's doing but then she won't be nervous anymore and the adrenaline will be gone.

She said the adrenaline is what drives her.

"I did a concert here in Fort Worth with a symphony for a bunch of second- and third-graders," Yang said. "It was a mess. I was very distracted because the kids had never been to a concert before. They were running around, clapping when they weren't supposed to, even shouting."

After the show, someone told Yang there was a little girl crying in her seat because the music was so moving.

"Playing music connects you to a side you never knew you had," Yang said. "It's worth all the work. Even just one person moved, like the little girl, makes it worth it."

One audience member commented on Yang's body movement and facial expressions. She smiled and said she can never watch or listen to herself play, she finds too many faults and criticizes herself too much.

All pieces are open to interpretation, but the hard part is getting those interpretations to work and show through on stage, she said.

"Playing music for an audience is a very intimate thing," Yang said. "If you are happy doing it, it's the most rewarding job. It's a very emotional occupation. If I only move one person in the audience, I know it's worth it."