

Review: 'New world' showcases brilliant new talent

By PEG GOLDBERG LONGSTRETH

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Giora Schmidt. Joyce Yang.

Two weeks ago it was the brilliant young violinist, Giora Schmidt, who brought down the house at the Naples Philharmonic Center for the Arts. His contribution to the evening was an utterly stellar performance of Sibelius' Violin Concerto.

Schmidt is 24.

Friday evening, Joyce Yang's technical virtuosity and flawless interpretation of Tchaikovsky's beloved Piano Concerto No. 1 in B Flat Minor not only brought down the house at the conclusion of her performance, she also received cheers and a standing ovation at the end of the lengthy first movement of the concerto.

Yang is 22.

The fact that two movements of the Tchaikovsky were yet to come was irrelevant. Every person in the hall knew they were in the presence of greatness. And when the concerto was concluded, the deafening roar from the audience left no doubt whatsoever about how Yang's performance — and the equally fine performance by the Naples Philharmonic Orchestra — was received.

The excitement was palpable.

The Korean-born Yang is the youngest pianist ever selected for participation in the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. At the time she was only 19 and a student at Juilliard. Yang was awarded the silver medal at the competition. Watching and listening to her perform Friday evening, it is nearly impossible to fathom who could possibly have bested her for the gold.

With not an iota of nervousness visible, Yang was dazzling during the seemingly endless octaves that flowed from her fingertips, as if their degree of difficulty was absolutely of no consequence whatsoever. Yet, if you were fortunate enough to hear her delightful exchange with the Phil's Maestro, Jorge Mester, prior to the concert, one thing you probably were immediately struck by was the fact there is a certain delicacy to her hands and their every movement. She does not have gigantically long fingers; her wrists are slender. Not at all the body type one would expect to be able to forcefully dominate the keyboard during this demanding masterwork.

Yet that is precisely what she did.

The orchestra, replete with a number of wonderful contributions by several of its members (in particular, principal oboist Judy Christy and principal flutist Suzanne Kirton), the superb plucked pianissimo contributions of the strings, the ever present contributions of the horns — everything combined nearly perfectly in yet another tour de force performance by the philharmonic.

And Yang? Some of her notes were like the colors of springtime, all the while a veritable waterfall of arpeggios was issuing forth.

So how many times did she and Mester return to the stage to acknowledge the kudos? I think four, but I'm not certain. I was too busy cheering and applauding with the rest of the crowd.

And the second half of the program, the Czech-born Antonin Dvorak's Symphony No. 9 in E Minor, commonly referred to as the "New World Symphony"? It was equally splendid, hints of any number of early African-American spirituals embedded in a beautifully haunting theme which has been usurped by much of Protestantism, and sung as "Going Home."

You hear it as part and parcel of military funerals; you weep as a small child stands at attention while the American flag from his father or mother's coffin is carefully folded and presented to the family. The melody line was, frankly, unbearably poignant, particularly as the piercing melody issued forth from the oboe.

Once again kudos are due our dynamic maestro, Jorge Mester, for transforming this already fine orchestra into a musical force to be reckoned with. And kudos are especially due him for consistently securing some of the finest talent in the world as featured soloists.

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