

Pianist Joyce Yang performs at the Tonhalle (Zürich)



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Joyce Yang

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The "série jeune" (young performers) of the Tonhalle Society occasionally features artists who are destined to become universally acknowledged world-class stars. Such a career may well be expected for the just 22 year old South Korean pianist Joyce Yang. In the US where she won the silver medal at the renowned Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, her career has already taken off. During the current season, she will perform with fifteen American orchestras . In her solo recital at the Tonhalle in Zürich, she showed one of her fortes: her absolutely astonishing virtuosity.

In Johann Sebastian Bach's "Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue", Joyce Yang fully exploited the potential of the modern concert piano usually associated with the romantic era. Following a very individual interpretation of the Fantasy, she rendered the Fugue in precise rhythm as one rousing crescendo. Then with Robert Schumann's "Carnaval" opus 9, she stole the audience's hearts. These masquerades, in which the composer shows his own polarity but also includes portraits of his fiancé and his future wife, were interpreted in a fascinating manner. Whether portraying Florestan or Eusebius, Estrella or Chiarina, she brought them to life with tremendous suggestive power and imagination. There was no trace of routine but a youthful enthusiasm which grew contagious.

A challenge of a different kind was presented by the "Four Piano Pieces" opus 119 by Johann Sebastian Bach. Would such a young pianist be able to interpret these late, melancholy pieces appropriately ? Indeed she was ! She missed neither the elegiac, autumnal sound of the three first Intermezzi nor the upsurge and rich colors of the final Rhapsody. And then followed a show of pure virtuosity in Brahms' "Variations on a theme by Paganini" which the composer had played personally at the world premiere in Zürich in 1865. Joyce Yang mastered the "obstacle course" of 28 variations with top grades. The more difficult the technical requirements, the more joyfully she played. And then if one thought her energy exhausted, there was a surprise: The first encore was nothing less than Franz Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody !