



New York Concert Review

By Harris Goldsmith

Xiayin Wang, piano

Alice Tully Hall

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Dear Reader:

It gives me great pleasure to report that Xiayin Wang's magnificent recital on May 18th was a milestone; a true rite of passage! As they say, nothing succeeds like success and before Ms. Wang even played a note, a large upbeat audience roared its approval as she took her place on stage. The ensuing opening chords of Haydn's great last Sonata in E flat, Hob. XV1/52 (actually 62), played *Maestoso*, at once served notice that Ms. Wang's appealingly reticent musical persona familiar to this writer from her several previous recitals and her compact disc (Marquis 81369) had metamorphosed into a bigger, bolder, confident and more interesting artiste. Rarely have I heard such an outstanding transformation (just for comparison, try Ms. Wang's small scaled, shapeless performance of Mozart's K. 330 Sonata on the cited recording). The Haydn was heroically revealed; the subito fortissimos at the ends of the first movement exposition and recapitulation had just the startling impact Haydn specified; the *Adagio* had remarkable gravitas and the movement's imperious forte interjections and audacious juxtapositions of unexpected key relationships all enhanced the work's harmonic tensions. The Finale too burst forth with a blistering *Presto*. Ms. Wang, you might say, made the Haydn sound like early Beethoven, and I think she was stylistically right on the money.

Chopin's Ballade No. 2 in F Major, Op. 38 (some musicians like Brahms and Murray Perahia insist that the composition ends and should be identified as being "in A minor") began liltingly, its opening melody lovingly shaped with subtle, unobtrusive rubato. The fierce ensuing second part came as an avalanche and the forward-thrusting phrasing slashed forward with unflinching direction and purpose. The potentially terrifying coda was rendered with note perfect confidence and accuracy: A great performance.

There were two World Premieres on Ms. Wang's program. Richard Danielpour's Preludes Book II, "The Enchanted Garden", proved accessible and appealing. The first piece, "Persepolis" was rather suggestive of Poulenc. The second, "Surrounded by Idiots" scampered about engagingly; the Third was an "Elegy"; the Fourth "Lean Kat Stride" a jazzy free for all. And inevitably, for a suite called "The Enchanted Garden" Mr. Danilepour turned his sights to Ravel's Mother Goose Suite. The pleasingly derivative music was beautifully written for the piano and evidently tailor-made for its dedicatee who played it to the hilt. The other World Premiere, Sean Hickey's *Cursive* was a bit harder for this reviewer to absorb in one hearing, but it, too, was demandingly and effectively written for the piano (Hickey, according to his bio was trained as a jazz guitarist). His piece was also handsomely played by Ms. Wang.

Everyone these days seems to be fielding Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit* and Ms. Wang's account of Scarbo was unusually robust and large scaled (with all its fearsome repeated notes and virtuoso obstacles magnificently under control).

Scriabin's 1903 *Valse*, Op. 38 was elegantly bittersweet. (Ms. Wang has always shown special affinity for the short-lived Russian composer's slightly demented music and, as this review is written, a new all-Scriabin Naxos recording from Ms. Wang is imminently awaiting release.) The formal portion of the concert ended with one of the fastest, fleetest accounts of Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz No. 1* with all its swashbuckling glissandos (which we heard earlier in the Danielpour), and leaps brilliantly nailed.

For an encore, the pianist beguiled us with one of those Chinese *Picture Postcards*, "The Autumn Mood over the Calm Lake" from the Dvorak dynasty (you might say that pentatonic scales were as typical of the Czech composer's music as any quintessential Chinese or Japanese stereotype).