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Young Concert Artists, Inc.

Chu-Fang Huang, pianist

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Flagstaff Symphony Orchestra successfully explores sound

By Charles M. Spining

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Eliciting a wildly enthusiastic response from Friday's Ardrey Auditorium audience, this concert was also Flagstaff's introduction to the second candidate for the position of Flagstaff FSO artistic and musical director, Peter Jaffe. Imbued with a large store of energy and enthusiasm, Jaffe can be described as one whose conducting style exemplifies the "broad statement." Tall in stature and with a physical presence given to the "grand gesture," Jaffe literally bounded on stage to lead the orchestra with a competence that effectively united and melded the unusually large instrumental forces at his command. An effusive and warmly personal approach is demonstrated both on and off the podium, during a week of contacts with local schools and various segments of the community, in the traditional pre-concert talk with members of the audience, and in the requisite "mingling" at a downtown restaurant following the evening's performance.

Complementing Jaffe's appearance on Friday was the debut of a truly remarkable young pianist just embarking on what will be a spectacular career, Chu-Fang Huang. Huang took on the difficult and rhythmically challenging Ravel concerto, a work that again exemplifies

unique orchestral elements challenging the skills of pianist, accompanying orchestra, and conductor. Huang began her piano studies at the age of seven in China, came to this country at the age of 14, and now performs an average of 50 concerts a year throughout the world.

Her performance here of the Ravel concerto was an example of total command of pianistic technique, musicality, and rapport with orchestra and conductor. The atmospheric second movement, with its extended solo passages and languid waltz rhythm gave ample opportunity for the pianist's freedom of expression and effective communicative dialogue with winds and strings of the orchestra (thanks are due to the audience for not interrupting with applause between each movement -- we were gently chided in rather lengthy pre-concert announcements not to do that!) The not unexpected (and at that point appropriate) response by the audience to the spectacular finale called for an encore of most of the last movement, with pianist and conductor brought back to the stage for numerous rounds of well-deserved applause and vocal demonstrations of approval for what has so far been one of the highlights of the current FSO season.