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Chu-Fang Huang, pianist

The Miami Herald

Young pianist shows great depth in debut

Monday, May 21, 2007
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It's been a good fortnight for pianophiles in Miami with Evgeny Kissin's Carnival Center recital and the Miami International Piano Festival. The lineup of keyboard artists continued with the local debut of Chu-Fang Huang at Gusman Concert Hall, presented by Sunday Afternoons of Music.

The Chinese pianist, 25, came to national attention after capturing the Cleveland International Piano Competition in 2005. A former student of Claude Frank at the Curtis Institute, Huang is currently in postgraduate studies at the Juilliard School.

Although Huang possesses sterling credentials, one was unprepared for her level of artistic maturity, technical gleam and, especially, depth of interpretation. Huang appears to have it all, even showing herself a poised and articulate communicator in her spoken introductions.

Huang led off the recital with a lively Scarlatti set, her vital articulation and swagger consistently underlining the music's off-kilter wit and rhythmic ingenuity. In the Sonata in F minor, K.466, Huang plumbed an extraordinary degree of expression, her spacious phrasing sustaining a mood of dark introspection.

The artist's gift for probing beneath the score's surface was most evident in her interpretation of Schumann's *Fantasia in C major*. Arguably, the most profound of his solo piano output, the *Fantasia* was written in the depths of the composer's despair after Schumann's proposal to his beloved Clara was rejected by her father.

This is music with which Huang clearly feels a close empathy, as shown by her singularly compelling performance. Huang possesses a commanding sonority, and the dark drama of the turbulent opening movement was powerfully manifest. She was fully in synch with Schumann's bifurcated muse, drawing on a wide, dynamic palette and relaxing into the more inward passages with the greatest tenderness and softest half-tones.

Huang blazed through the middle march movement with staggering virtuosity but was at her finest in the concluding slow movement. Time seemed to stand still, Huang's sensitive phrasing distilling the music's solace and quiet strength.

The pianist also showed imagination in her offbeat choice of three Debussy Preludes. She put across the quirky satire of *General Lavine-Eccentric* with fine, forceful spirit and brought a range of pointillist shading to *Voiles*. The contemporary *Ballade (2004)* by Benjamin C.S. Boyle fit nicely with the Debussy. Huang's expressive style proved well suited to the music's dark rumination and burst of bravura.

Many artists tackle Ravel's *La Valse* as a mere pianistic flame-thrower, but Huang took a more layered approach, communicating the score's originality and detail. The waltz sections were thrown off with apt swagger, yet Huang consistently illuminated detail, as with the foreshadowing of the left-hand rumblings. While the violent accents and climactic implosion were thrilling, Huang's performance went far beyond the pyrotechnics to give us the music's tormented soul.

Huang rounded off the recital with an exhilarating whirlwind account of the Presto finale from a Haydn sonata. Let's have this supremely gifted artist back in Miami soon.