



BREAKING THE SILENCE

A Q&A with pianist

Joyce Yang

who will perform a solo recital concert at The Wallis on January 24

Q: YOU WERE THE YOUNGEST MEDALIST OF THE VAN CLIBURN INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION. WHAT EFFECT HAS THAT HONOR HAD ON YOUR CAREER?

A: Receiving the silver medal at the Cliburn competition changed my life. I entered the competition as the youngest contestant – at age 19. I had just finished my freshman year at Juilliard. When the medal was put around my neck, I had to grow up overnight – become an artist overnight. People were suddenly comparing my interpretation to those of the greatest pianists of all time. And I had to fulfill the role of the silver medalist – which meant playing 40-plus concerts a year for the next three years. People were asking, “What do you have to offer to the world? What do you think separates you from the rest of the performers out there?” I had never been asked these questions before. I had to quickly figure out all of my answers. I was playing and performing in front of people because that’s what I love to do. It was as simple as that. Suddenly, I had to explain myself, develop a point of view, and define my existence. Pretty daunting for a teenager!

Q: WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE SOLO PIANO RECITAL WITHIN THE CLASSICAL MUSIC LANDSCAPE?

A: I think solo recitals are very unique to pianists. We walk on stage alone. We are there to deliver a soliloquy – there is nothing to bounce off of, there is nobody that will finish the sentence if I stall. We pull our sounds out of thin air – breaking the silence. It is a challenge and a gift that we get to do this. I end up interacting with all the voices within – some that I like, some that I don’t. In a way, it is a battle within myself, and a process of understanding myself when all the nerves are

present. Always find something new about myself and the music I am delivering in each performance. I think solo recitals are very intimate; it really gives an audience a chance to dive into the performer’s mind in the most direct way.

Q: HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT SELECTING YOUR MUSICAL PROGRAM?

A: First, I try to pick a piece or two that I love – that is the main trunk of the tree – and then I branch out. I like to interweave seemingly unrelated pieces into a collage. I am drawn to interesting juxtaposition of pieces. It is like curating an exhibit. Each piece should be great on its own but when put together, it should become one continuous journey.

Q: ANY PARTICULAR INSIGHTS ON THE WORKS OF SCHUMANN, VINE, DEBUSSY, GRANADOS & GINASTERA THAT YOU’LL BE PERFORMING AT THE WALLIS?

A: This is a very adventurous program! In the first half, we have Schumann’s Romances in three movements. Schumann suffered from multi-personality syndrome and his composition reflect this condition. He writes three completely different kinds of romance. I get to explore impulsive mood shifts – it is always a wild ride to play Schumann. The constant mood shifts in Schumann will ready the audience for Australian composer Carl Vine’s *Anne Landa Preludes*: a series of 12 contrasting short Preludes, each with a different title. One of the movements here is actually called *Romance* – and the audience will hear how different an idea of romance can be from one composer to another. I like showcasing new music in my recital program – this is definitely the wild card of the evening – it will be new for the audience but I think

his music is very powerful even from the first hearing. I hope this piece resonates with the audience throughout the concert – I think some aspects of the *Anne Landa Preludes* get “echoed” in the second half of the recital. For example, Vine’s use of chords moving in parallel motion echoes in Debussy, and playful polyrhythm get reiterated in parts of the Ginastera. Second half of the program is infused with Spanish flare. Debussy’s *Estampes* contains three movements - the middle movement was written after his first visit to Granada, Spain. Then comes two selection from *Goyescas* by Granados. These are very indulgent (and very difficult!) selections. You really get that heavy dose of “perfume” within the music. For the last piece of the evening, we travel to Argentina. Three Argentinian dances by Ginastera is made up of three contrasting dances. The first dance is quirky dance of an old herdsman, the second dance a slow dance of a beautiful maiden (with one of the most breathtaking melodies in all of piano literature), and the third is the wild and unbridled dance of an arrogant cowboy – that brings us to a big finish!

Q: FINALLY, WHAT MUSIC DO YOU LISTEN TO WHEN YOU’RE NOT WORKING?

A: I love to listen to Eric Clapton and Sinatra. I do listen to a plenty of classical music: I love the string quartet repertoire, and I often listen to pianists Emil Gilels and Sviatoslav Richter for inspiration.

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