

Firestone030408

I think winter's return caused everyone to be in a worse mood than usual Sunday afternoon. There was some hope the recital of guest pianist Juyeon Kang, titled "Joyful Noise," might lift the gloom a bit. It was, in fact, both joyful and noisy, but, nonetheless, left much to be desired.

Kang's entire program consisted of selections that showcased technique, which she possesses in abundance. Her problems lie in the area of artistic interpretation. This was painfully evident in Johann Sebastian Bach's "Italian Concerto" (BWV 971). She handled its frills and furbelows effortlessly, but, according to music maven and friend Claire Matthews, "Completely lost sight of the melody in the third (presto) movement."

She performed three "Grand Etudes of Paganini" by Franz Liszt more successfully since they are designed to give the audience the impression the performer is doing a heroic job with enormously difficult material (Liszt liked to show off at the piano and elsewhere). My friend pianist Byrnell Figler remarked, "They're not as difficult as they sound -- more bang for the buck."

Figler thought the program was planned intelligently, though. After intermission, Kang played four preludes from "Preludes Book II" by Claude Debussy and then concluded the recital with Alexander Scriabin's "Sonata No. 5" (Opus 53). Following this, Figler explained the Scriabin sonata "fuses a lot of Liszt and Debussy."

The audience went home in a better mood than before, but I wouldn't presume to guess whether they were cheered by the recital or just glad it was over.

In contrast, tenor Joseph Perniciaro's lecture-recital Monday evening was a great success. The subject, based on Perniciaro's doctoral work, was Ross Lee Finney's song cycle "Chamber Music," a musical setting of James Joyce's "suite" of 36 poems. Finney, an American composer who deserves to be better known, composed "Chamber Music" in the early 1950's, but it wasn't published until 1985.

Perniciaro's talk provided a great deal of information on Finney's life and work, on James Joyce, and on the "compositional characteristics" of "Chamber Music." To illustrate these, he and pianist Tali Morgulis performed brief examples drawn from the songs of the cycle.

But the best came last, when they performed 17 of the songs. Tenor Perniciaro has not only a fine voice and solid vocal technique, but also a fine artistic sensibility. Moreover, he can act. And he and Morgulis work well together. This time out, they had material worthy of their talent. The songs move from the joys of love through betrayal by a rival to loss, isolation and grief. The music conveys these emotions by moving from light lyricism to dark, brooding intensity of tone.

At the conclusion the artists received enthusiastic applause. Also, many members of the audience remained to congratulate them and to learn more about Finney and "Chamber Music."

* The next event in the FHSU series is the 3 p.m. choral concert Sunday at Beach/Schmidt.

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