



Young Concert Artists Gala Concert

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Young Concert Artists Gala Features Three Rising Soloists

James R. Oestreich | *The New York Times* | May 8, 2015

Young Concert Artists makes no claim to quality in its name. But over 54 years, through its choices of artists it has helped to develop careers, in many cases, major ones.

The evidence was all around at the organization's annual gala concert on Tuesday evening at Alice Tully Hall. Three brilliant young soloists performed concertos with the Orchestra of St. Luke's, led by the veteran conductor Gerard Schwarz, who was himself discovered by Young Concert Artists as a trumpeter in 1971.

There were no repertory adventures here, and that undoubtedly suited the gala audience members just fine. On their way to a fancy dinner being set up in the lobby, they were clearly not looking to be challenged, but they were just as clearly involved in the performances and loudly appreciative.

As well they might have been. A 24-year-old pianist named simply Ji led off with Mozart's Concerto No. 23, giving a fluid reading with crystalline articulation, his fingers dancing over the keys.



The pianist Ji with the Orchestra of St. Luke's, conducted by Gerard Schwarz at Alice Tully Hall. Photo: Matt Dine



The violinist Benjamin Beilman with the Orchestra of St. Luke's. Photo: Matt Dine

Mr. Schwarz, as if anticipating the full-blown Romanticism of the works to follow, led an often robust performance, and Ji followed in kind, punching out accents as needed. He got to set the pace in the finale, and it was blistering, making demands on the orchestral players almost equal to those on himself.

The violinist Benjamin Beilman, 25, is already widely appreciated in New York, thanks to appearances with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and others. Here he played Sibelius's concerto, which has had several workouts in New York this season, most notably by Anne-Sophie Mutter and the Danish National Symphony Orchestra at Carnegie Hall in February.

But this performance, strong and uncannily accurate, could stand proudly alongside any of them. Mr. Beilman speaks double and triple stops as if they were his first language.

But the real revelation came in Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1, played by George Li, 19. Compared with the other two soloists, each with understated physical flair, Mr. Li cuts a less compelling figure. But he is a powerhouse. I have seldom heard the many blazing octave passages in the outer movements played faster or more cleanly, let alone both at the same time.

Mr. Li needs to develop flair of his own (start by making the impossible bravura demands look at least a little difficult) and to add poetry in lyrical moments. There is no reason to doubt that he can do so, and quickly.