



George Li, *pianist*

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Review: Pianist George Li spellbinding with Pa. Sinfonia

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George Li gave a captivating performance of Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1

Every so often comes one of those concert experiences where soloist and orchestra are both on the same page, and leave one spellbound. So it was Saturday evening at the First Presbyterian Church in Allentown, when pianist George Li joined the Pennsylvania Sinfonia Orchestra in a captivating performance of Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1.

It was clear at once from the dramatic opening of the Chopin concerto that Li plays directly from the heart, with an astonishing ability to project a musical phrase. What is hard to believe, however, is the fact that this offhand ability to toss out so beautifully shaped musical lines is coming from a 20-year-old, and not a Dinu Lipatti or a Horowitz.

Li's inner passion pervaded the vigorous first movement, where he really turned the heat on to some gloriously rich string accompaniment. Yet he revealed wonderful introspection and lyricism in the serene second movement, where his left hand would gently rise above the keyboard before floating down gently, like a falling leaf. His phrases would build up like waves on an incoming tide, then serenely fall back.

The ebullient third movement revealed that Li, while not a consummate showman, could certainly strut his virtuosic stuff. It is an incredibly difficult rondo featuring a rousing *krakowiak*, the Polish national dance. Highly syncopated in tricky duple-time, Li had countless opportunity to display the pianist's art, and even a bit of hearty stomping from the orchestra.

Li generously performed two encores. The second, Liszt's *Grande Etude "La Campanella,"* was a showstopper, demonstrating amazing articulation and dexterity, with Li's right hand jumping between intervals with impossible speed.

