



Ji, pianist

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Pieces flow together in dazzling performance by pianist Ji

KEVIN WILT | *The Shiny Sheet* | April 05, 2017

Pianist Ji closed out the Young Concert Artists season for the Chamber Music Society of Palm Beach Tuesday night at the Rosarian Academy. Ji – it is a mononym such as Sting or Adele – crafted an exceptional program of pieces that had no business being performed together, but somehow worked wonders.

The concert began, not with a stiff introduction from a board member, but with an offstage voiceover from Ji himself, initiated with a simple “Hey, it’s Ji.” He explained his motivation for the program, and, perhaps more importantly, invited the audience to join him on the upcoming musical journey.

Upon arrival, Ji began strumming and scratching directly on the strings of the piano in Henry Cowell’s *The Banshee*. Every single vibration was important to this performance, a standard he was setting for the entire concert.

Without break, he launched into Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* BWV 659, a work so far removed from Cowell’s, that, to some, they could be considered different art forms. Following Bach was a remarkably intense performance of Maurice Ravel’s *La Valse*. Ji poured so much into this piece, that it knocked parts of the piano out of tune for the rest of the concert, but that did not matter at all.

Next was more Bach, with the famous *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* BWV 645 (*Sleepers, Awake*). The delicacy of this piece after the torrential Ravel was astounding. After Bach was another significant gear change, with Frederic Chopin’s *Andante Spianato et Grande Polonaise* Op. 22.

After Chopin was John Cage’s *4’33”*. This piece is notable, because the pianist plays nothing, while the extraneous sounds of the room form the music. In many cases, this piece is programmed as a novelty. Here, it was almost required, as the built up energy in the room needed to dissipate. It was amazing to hear this work after the others, as if you were hearing their echoes leave the room for several minutes. Closing the concert was a tender performance of Robert Schumann’s *Arabesque*.

With every piece, Ji took an enormous amount of interpretive flexibility to make sure each said what he needed it to say. This included staggering energy management for the entire concert, as one piece flowed right into the next, between extreme highs and lows.

This was not a concert about hearing audience favorites played with precision. It was not about a wunderkind playing a famous cadenza in order to be fancy or impressive. It was about creating a shared human experience, and that is what art is about. This does not mean that everyone had the same reaction. Some in the crowd leapt to their feet, while a few others made for the exit. But it does mean everyone was engaged in the experience in a way that was meaningful to them.