



## Nathan Lee, *pianist*



### Prokofiev Fest's First Night at Seattle Symphony

Seattle, Washington

Philippa Kiraly • January 20, 2018



Cover image: pianist Nathan Lee (Photo: Matt Dine)

Festivals highlighting a particular composer often give an insight into how he developed (I've never heard of one for a woman composer, not yet), and this week's Seattle Symphony two-concert festival of concertos and one symphony by Prokofiev is a case point.

The first, Thursday night at Benaroya Hall, contained his first three concertos, written in his early 20s, two for piano, one for violin, all precociously brilliant works. The inventive branching out from the tried and true, the ideas behind it, the imaginative development, all bespoke the promise of the future, and there are hints of his later unmistakable harmonic signature. Both piano concerti, which Prokofiev himself premiered aged 22 and 23, are technical feats of wizardry for the pianist. Appropriately for the young and gifted composer, on Thursday all three soloists and the conductor were also young and gifted.

Nathan Lee, aged 16 but looking even younger, gave a performance of the first concerto, in D-flat major that was both memorable and extraordinary. It's played as one movement, though with three distinct sections. Lee's command of the work was obvious from the first notes. His playing sounded authoritative and decisive, sharp-edged, clearly delineated in the fastest runs, in all of which every note had its appropriate dynamic, the whole youthfully ebullient and fun. The slower section had transparent clarity and richness while it gave time for Lee to shape phrases. Despite myriad notes executed at incredible speed, I noticed only one single time when Lee hit two notes instead of one as his fingers flew over the keys. This was a highly musical performance. Lee does not bang on the piano, although there were many opportunities to do so.

The notable synchronization between Lee and Pablo Rus Broseta, the orchestra's associate conductor, was a marvel to hear. It's rare to hear such absolutely exact togetherness between soloist and orchestra throughout a work, yet it was there.