



Nathan Lee, *pianist*

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Nathan Lee makes ambitious Washington debut



Nathan Lee. (Matt Dine)

By Patrick Rucker April 30, 2018

Pianist Nathan Lee hails from the Seattle area, where he studies with Sasha Starcevich. Lee won the 2016 Young Concert Artists auditions in New York when he was 15. Sunday afternoon, he made his Washington debut at the Kennedy Center under the auspices of YCA and Washington Performing Arts.

Lee's program would be formidable for a pianist three times his age. He began with arguably the most elaborate of Bach's Six Partitas, the fourth in D major, followed by Mozart's late Adagio in B Minor. The first half of the recital ended with the Variations from 1984 by Nikolai Kapustin, a Russian composer now in his 80s, whose music could be described as a fusion of jazz with the traditional Russian piano school. After intermission, we heard Chopin's B-minor sonata, followed by Alfred Grünfeld's frothy "Soiree de Vienne," based on Strauss waltzes.

Lee is immensely self-assured, his relaxed demeanor at the piano due no doubt to the ample technical resources at his disposal. His playing is virtually note perfect. His Bach, for instance, was poised, well mannered, and a model of clarity. The Kapustin Variations were persuasive and the Grünfeld waltz medley had all the appropriate Viennese "schwung."

What was less discernible in Lee's playing Sunday afternoon was the nascent sense of an original voice, that quality that lifts a performance from a simulacrum of the music to an authentic utterance, born of necessity. Finding this quality full-blown in someone Lee's age is rare, but the potential can often be glimpsed. With luck, professional pressures can be held at bay and life experience will bring Lee's considerable gifts into full bloom.

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