

Lucid Culture

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Classical Accordionist Hanzhi Wang Brings Darkly Dynamic New Nordic Compositions to Carnegie Hall

Hanzhi Wang isn't the first accordionist to specialize in new classical music, but she is the first-ever squeezebox player to earn inclusion on the **Young Concert Artists** roster. Even though more composers these days are writing for the accordion, that's still a pretty big deal. Wang has a magically dynamic album of concise new works by Nordic composers, *On the Path to H.C. Andersen*, streaming at **Spotify**. She's making her Carnegie Hall debut on Oct 22 at 8:30 PM in Zankel Hall, playing works by Bach, Gubaidulina, Moszkowski, Piazzolla and Martin Lohse. Along with this past summer's Bryant Park Accordion Festival – and maybe **Golden Fest**, which always has plenty of accordion music – this is THE big accordion event of the year in New York.

The first composition is **Lohse**'s Menuetto, a steady, Philip Glass-ine, austere waltzing theme punctuated by airy, rather still interludes, growing more uneasy as its distantly baroque-tinged, cell-like variations rise and then recede.

Lohse's triptych Passing begins with a similarly circling if almost marionettishly pulsing allegro section. The steady, moonlit waltz that follows is deliciously ominous; the concluding variation is 180 degrees the opposite until that same resonance is artfully interpolated amidst the starry, flitting optimism. Wang's precision, all the way through a persistent strobe effect, is striking.

A final Lohse piece, The Little Match Girl begins with sparse, Ligeti-esque syncopation and expands from there: the central theme reminds of the old English folk tune Scarborough Fair. Wang has gone on record as having a close personal connection to its persistent melancholy since it reminds her of her first solitary days and weeks as a Chinese accordion student abroad for the first time in Denmark.

She negotiates the twisted turns and sudden bursts of *Jabberwocky*, by Jesper Koch with carnivalesque vigor and finesse. The creepiest number here is Tears, by Bent Lorentzen, building to from ethereal suspense to phantasmagorical Flight of the Bumblebee clusters, murky low atmospherics and poltergeist accents bursting in from the shadows.

Wang concludes the album with **Svend Aaquist**'s practically fifteen-minute *Saga Night*, which quickly becomes a dissociatively eerie, rhythmically challenging fugue. A heroic theme is alluded to but never hit head-on; then a variation on the opening quasi-fugue makes an enigmatic return. In a way, it's practically a synopsis of the album as a whole. While some of these pieces could conceivably be played on organ or by a string ensemble, nothing beats the plaintive lusciousness of Wang's instrument of choice.

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