

Concert Review: Candlelight Concert Society Presents 'Hanzhi Wang, Accordion' at Howard Community College, Smith Theatre

By Susan Brall - October 8, 2019



Hanzhi Wang, Accordion, Candlelight Concert Society.

The Candlelight Concert Society began its new season with a wonderful concert "Hanzhi Wang, accordion" at the Smith Theatre at the Horowitz Visual & Performing Arts Center at Howard Community College in Columbia, MD. **If anyone can make the accordion sound like it was created to play classical music, it is the talented and young Ms. Wang.**

Wang is noted for her wonderful stage presence and is the only accordionist to ever win a place on the roster of Young Concert Artists in its history. She is also the First Prize Winner of the 2017 Young Concert Artists International Auditions.

Wang earned a Bachelor's degree from China Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and a Master's degree at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen where she now serves as an assistant teacher.

She opened with some older classical pieces. Up first was Johannes Sebastian Bach (1685–1750). Wang performed Bach's "Partita no. 2 in C minor, BWV 826" including "Sinfonia," "Sarabande" and "Rondeaux." The sounds created in the first and last were reminiscent of that of the harpsichord or pipe organ, both dominated musical composition before the wide acceptance of the piano. The middle piece had the sound of woodwinds, flutes, clarinets and the bass sounds of the bassoon. It was followed by the work of Domenico Scarlatti (1685–1757), "Sonata in A major, K323: L 95," "Sonata in F major, K378: L276" and "Sonata in E major, K162: L21."

Again, we heard the influences of the instruments of Scarlatti's time. (The accordion was not yet invented at the time.) Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764) "Selections from Pièces de clavecin" including "L' Egyptienne," "La Livri" and "Le rappel des Oiseaux" ended the first part of the concert. The last selection was the most interesting, as it reflected the sounds of birds and had a humorous touch. This brought out Ms. Wang's wonderful stage presence and made us happily anticipate what was to come after intermission.

After the break, we jumped to more modern music. The Russian Alfred Schnittke (1934–1998) opened. This piece has an interesting history. It was first written to accompany Gogol's "The Inspector's Tale" which was banned by the old Soviet government for making comparisons to present corruption so evident. It was later revised for the accordion as "Revis Fairy Tale." This also poked fun at the government but in a less obvious satire. (The name implies that fact.) This piece was my personal favorite. The first section was humorous. It almost sounded like music for a cartoon.

The second movement was Chaplinesque, think "Modern Times." Then, it switched to a waltz and was followed by a lively polka beat. Wang herself transposed the "Holberg Suite" of Edvard Grieg (1843–1907) for the accordion. It included "Praeludium," "Gavotta" and "Rigaudon." In my opinion, this group was the only selection that did not seem to suit her instrument. Although, Wang played beautifully. Astor Piazzola (1921–1992) actually wrote for the accordion. His music spotlighted Wang's talent and love of her instrument. "Milonga del Angel" was a tango while "La Muerte del Angel" made me feel like I was on a gondola in Venice.

In her encore, Wang performed an original piece "My Story" which reflected her Chinese heritage. (Wang grew up and went to college in China.) This was the most moving music of the evening. I closed my eyes and could just picture cruising on the Yangtze River watching the people along the shore. It was tranquil and serene. The last piece of the night was a lively one by Moritz Moszkowski, "Sparks."

In keeping with CCS's mission of working to enrich the community, Hanzhi Wang performed at a senior community in Columbia before leaving. We were also treated to a String Quartet by Hayden performed by Howard County GT Orchestra as part of the Candlelight Concert Society's Student Performance Series. We listened to these talented high school students as we toasted the new season. It was a perfect ending to the evening.

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