



Ji-Yong, *pianist*

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Sinfonietta Puts Forth The Young and The Rowdy

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Any orchestra that dares to put a Mozart piano concerto at one end of a program and a concerto for steel drums and orchestra at the other had better have the artistic wherewithal to justify its chutzpah.

Fortunately, Chicago Sinfonietta has been shaped into a buff and vigorous chamber orchestra in its 19 seasons under founder and Music Director Paul Freeman. And its concert Monday at Orchestra Hall was another example of how the nation's most racially diverse professional orchestra is also among the most musically diverse.

The Mozart was the composer's Concerto No. 9 in E-Flat, K.271 ("Jeunehomme"). Monday's soloist was a very young man, indeed, the 15-year-old South Korea-born Ji-Yong. He is the youngest pianist ever to win the New York Philharmonic's youth competition, earning himself a debut with that orchestra at the ripe old age of 10.

Some prodigies exude mostly flash and have little substance. Ji-Yong is the exception, a thorough musician. He revealed a command of the Mozart sound and style. This was not simply elegant execution of the notes but a caring regard for what lies behind them--an awareness of the laughter that quickly gives way to tears.

He sailed through the outer movements with a wide palette of touch and articulation, displaying graceful finger work in the many solo passages. The central Andantino was especially remarkable for the way he floated an unbroken singing line, as a great vocalist would.

Sturdily framed by the orchestra, his Mozart radiated the confidence of a gifted, sensitive young pianist who is clearly going places. I very much look forward to hearing Ji-Yong again.