



George Li, *pianist*

The Boston Musical Intelligencer

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Zander and Li Deliver the Russians

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Photo: Christian Steiner

The Boston Philharmonic, conducted by Benjamin Zander, gave us memorable Rachmaninoff and Shostakovich at Sanders Theatre on November 15th. George Li, a 17-year-old pianist attending the Walnut Hill School for the Arts while studying privately at the New England Conservatory, opened with a strikingly mature interpretation of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, Opus 18.

The romance of the piece lies not just in its popular melodies but in its yearning dissonance that tugs at the listener, and also in the signature richness of Rachmaninoff's lower register voicing, which one tends to associate with his legendary, large hands. That is why it was so astonishing to hear such depth, power and range in a performance by such a young pianist.

With the very first opening notes, Li gently commenced with graceful sensitivity that formed into a softly playful lyricism, but containing all the complexity of expression needed to develop later into a powerful fortissimo of fully voiced richness and suspending dissonance. Li's interpretation of the adagio was memorably distinctive for its Mozartean simplicity in the beginning, in contrast to its theme returning more passionately each time. His supreme delicacy brought forth in the music a very unique and latent element of wonder, his youth belying a musical maturity equal to his effortlessly flowing sense of ensemble. According to Zander's opening discussion, Li's "secret" is that he is not a "lonely pianist" but an experienced ensemble player who enjoys collaborating with other musicians. A deeply sensitive listener, his ensemble experience certainly shined through in the exquisite rhythmic clarity of his entire performance.

Li's triumphant finish was followed by a standing ovation and two Rachmaninoff encores (Daisies, and Prelude in G Minor), expressing in solo the full range of Rachmaninoff's art.