



George Li, *pianist*

Pianist George Li and Conductor Ben Zander Make Magic

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At the age of 17, George Li already has a resumé any musician would envy.

One of the things I like most about conductor Benjamin Zander is his use, again and again, of the same hugely gifted young artists. At Sunday's concert at Cambridge's Sanders Theatre (the third performance of this Boston Philharmonic Orchestra program), pianist George Li was a great example of a musician who has benefited from a longtime collaboration with Mr. Zander. For those who have yet to hear him (do try!), pianist George Li is – at 17 – no longer a child prodigy, although he looks far younger than his years. George Li already has a resumé any musician would envy.

A Young Concert Artists Winner, Li has appeared as soloist with the Cleveland Orchestra after winning first prize at the Cooper Competition at Oberlin Conservatory of Music and has played with a host of other prestigious orchestras and at many concert venues. Young Concert Artists (YCA) has presented him in NYC's Merkin Hall, Washington DC's Kennedy Center, and the Gardner Museum. He's an artist worth watching – and hearing.

I first heard George Li in a solo recital at Gardner Museum this January and was astonished by the mastery and beauty of his playing. Generally, I am not fond of the idea of child prodigies, so I reluctantly went to hear him. I ended up falling under the spell of his playing. At Walnut Hill School, where Li is a senior, he gave another spectacular recital, so by this concert, in which he played Rachmaninov's extremely popular Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 18, I expected to be very impressed. And I was, but I was also deeply moved and amazed. Where does such musical maturity and – let's face it – genius come from? Li's phrasing, the beauty of his sound, his perfect pedaling and expressive rhythm, a kind of sensitivity to the orchestral players that usually comes from years of playing chamber music – all were in play. Zander conducted masterfully throughout the afternoon so that the two musical warhorses revealed fresh and compelling insights. By now George Li knows that everyone wants him to play more, so he always rushes back, sits down, and amazes some more. No playing coy with him! His encores were well-known pieces: a C# minor nocturne by Chopin and a Rachmaninov Prelude. The entire audience was up on its feet cheering madly after the concerto and each encore.