



## George Li, *pianist*

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#### Pianist George Li Has Musical Maturity Well-Beyond his 17 Years

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(Ruby Washington/New York Times photo)

A supremely confident 17-year-old from Boston made an impressive *début* in the city on Tuesday night. Pianist George Li left the Music Toronto audience at the Jane Mallett Theatre convinced that he is the real thing.

His was an old-school solo recital, presented without a word of introduction or interaction. It was about a pianist in a black suit sitting down at a big, black concert grand piano on an otherwise empty stage to captivate an audience with nothing but his skill in telling stories with the tips of 10 fingers.

Those fingers were not just the vehicles for showing off prodigious technique. They were the conduits of an artistic imagination that already had a lot it wanted to say, imprinting each piece with a distinct shape and sound at once faithful to tradition yet also bearing the mark of the person sitting on the padded piano bench.

The Viennese portion of the programme featured Beethoven's "*Waldstein*" *Piano Sonata*, Carl Czerny's *Variations on a Theme by Rode* and *Six Little Pieces* by Arnold Schoenberg. Budapest (and environs) was represented by *Consolation No. 3* and *Hungarian Dance No. 5* by Franz Liszt and Béla Bartók's 1926 *Piano Sonata*.

The modernist pieces were the most remarkable, demonstrating how even atonal music can be bent into beguiling shapes. Bartók's fierce rhythmically complex piece vibrated with life and good cheer.

Li successfully channeled Liszt the proto rock star, while serving up the Czerny musical pastry on an immaculate silver tray.

Any 17-year-old pianist worth his or her ambition should nowadays be expected to play all of the pieces on this programme flawlessly. But Li also possesses great interpretive instincts.

Let's all hope they continue to serve him well, so that we can welcome him back to Toronto many more times in the coming years.