



George Li, *pianist*



Gilmore Young Artist George Li, 17, Makes Triumphant Return to Kalamazoo

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Since playing here at last spring's Gilmore Keyboard Festival, 2012 Gilmore Young Artist George Li has attracted countless followers, anxious to hear him again. Sunday afternoon he obliged with a remarkably strong performance in the Gilmore Rising Stars series. An overflow audience crammed Wellspring Theater to hear Li. His program was sure to please, showcasing fabled works by Beethoven, Chopin and Liszt.

Li began with Beethoven's Sonata No.14 in C-sharp Minor, Op. 27, No. 2, "Moonlight." From the first, the work offered evidence of a major attribute in Li's technique, absolute control of material.

Rolling chords in the right hand, that in the opening movement accompanied the melodic line in the left, remained totally even in tempo and volume. The fleet final movement was impeccably clean. Melody never failed, and chromatics passages gleamed with precision.

Chopin's Sonata No. 2 in B-flat Minor, Op. 35 exhibited Li's marvelous command in "Marche Funèbre." Complementing the delicate, thoughtful passages were brilliant trills in the left hand. The singing melodic line in the "Scherzo" was set off by shiny chromatic runs. Li played fiendishly fast octave runs with uncanny clarity in "Finale: Presto."

Li reached stunning heights with Beethoven's Sonata No. 21 in C Major, Op. 53, "Waldstein." His allegros in the first movement approximated prestos, but never lacked firm control. Repeated chords maintained remarkable evenness, even at accelerated tempos.

Liszt's hugely popular Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 in C-sharp Minor proved as satisfying as the Waldstein – which is to say, remarkable. Li's pianistic strengths again were evidenced: clear articulation of motifs and always-accessible melody.

Other undeniable winners were Li's incredibly presto repeated notes, cross hand passages and dancing chromatic scales. The Rachmaninoff cadenza was both intellectually and artistically intriguing. Seventeen-year-old Li clearly enjoyed himself; it was play, not work. Two brief Chopin encores, both delights, brought Li's triumphant return to a close. Li proved both a comer and a keeper.