



Yun-Chin Zhou, pianist

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Piano Perfecto

-Christopher Gage | KCMetropolis.org | January 28, 2015

There was not an empty seat in the Folly Theater for energetic young pianist Yun-Chin Zhou's exciting piano recital for the Harriman-Jewell Series last weekend.

The Harriman-Jewell "Discovery" concerts are a great way to bring good music to those who might not otherwise experience it: free admission, helpful program notes, some tips on concert etiquette, and post-concert conversation with the artist all accomplish much in the way of making people comfortable at a concert and helping them enjoy and understand what they are hearing. It was nearly impossible, however, for the audience not to enjoy last Saturday's concert, in which pianist Yun-Chin Zhou brought the atmosphere to dizzying heights, playing an excellent concert of repertoire spanning from Franz Joseph Haydn to twentieth-century musician Charles Trenet.



Photo: Matt Dine

The program evoked an especially interesting contrast between the first and last pieces, two piano sonatas – Haydn's Sonata No. 59 in E-flat major and Sergei Rachmaninoff's Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor – that showed just how the genre both changed and stayed the same over the course of over a century. Many piano recitals start with Haydn sonatas, but this one was a particularly good choice for an opening piece, as the bright, dance-like quality of the first movement was made even more exciting by Zhou's brilliant playing, which brought out lines clearly but also made the individual voices fit together to form a cohesive work. The Rachmaninoff displayed some of the architectural characteristics of the Haydn – overall arc of the three movements, form of the first movement, primacy of thematic material – but the harmonies were, of course, much more adventurous. In performing this early twentieth-century masterpiece, Zhou worked the audience into a frenzy with supreme technical and emotional control, especially the beautiful gestures of the second movement.

After the Haydn, Zhou presented two pieces straddling the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Franz Liszt's *Bénédiction de Dieu dans la Solitude* and Maurice Ravel's *La Valse*. The pianist's treatment of the Liszt was sensitive and introspective, presenting a change of pace from the energetic Haydn sonata that preceded it and demonstrating the spirituality and lyricism of the music. The first half of the concert ended with *La Valse*, a devilishly difficult piece that Zhou played masterfully, and the full house erupted with praise and appreciation after the last notes rang throughout the theater.

The most enjoyable part of the program – partly due to its uniqueness – was *Six Chansons* by Charles Trenet, arranged by Alexis Weissenberg. Each of these songs, evocative of the jazz-based harmonies of popular music in the early twentieth century, had a different flavor, from the surreal "Vous oubliez votre cheval" ("You're leaving your horse") to the soulful, bluesy "Vous qui passez sans me voir" ("You pass by without seeing me"). This charming set of pieces, along with the expert playing of the entire concert, enraptured the audience and contributed to a fantastic piano recital.