



Ji, pianist



Pianist Ji Showcases Technique at IPS

-William Furtwangler | Charleston Today | November 6, 2014

THE SECOND CONCERT of the CofC International Piano Series was supposed to feature Beth Levin, but she had to cancel at the last minute. Ran Dank, artistic director of the IPS, made use of his connections in the music world and secured a fitting replacement for Tuesday night's concert in the person of young Korean pianist Ji (pronounced Gee), a musical dynamo if there ever were one.

Ji's program was remarkable in its breadth and depth. He opened with a transcription of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Tocatta, Adagio and Fugue, BWV 564* by the late Romantic composer/piano virtuoso Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924).



Ji (Photo: Christian Steiner)

Originally for organ, it emerges in Busoni's piano version as complex and extraordinary as Bach's initial composition. Ji's mastery of the piano was as dramatic and thunderous as an organ. Ji set the stage with his second-to-none technique and mature insight for the remaining items on the program.

One of Franz Schubert's exquisitely melodic Impromptus (Op. 142, No. 3) followed the Bach-Busoni, providing a breather. Again, Ji demonstrated his musical understanding with this early Romantic work.

Closing out the first part of the evening, Ji tackled Sergei Prokofiev's 1942 Sonata No. 7 in B-flat Major, Op. 83 (the middle one of three "War Sonatas"). This nerve-racking and oppressive piece reflects the pain and suffering brought on by the violence of war. Ji, with his pile-driver technique, communicated the anguish and stress that Prokofiev wrote into this score. The audience in the Sottile Theatre seemed to be of two minds: some gave a standing ovation and others just sat in their seats either out of dislike or shock.

Five of Felix Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words* provided another welcome respite from the high drama of the Prokofiev. Ji's careful and tender readings of these short pieces were captivating.

Le Valse by Maurice Ravel concluded the concert. Originally written in 1920 for orchestra as a ballet, it was rejected by the impresario Diaghilev who said it was not a ballet, but a portrait of a ballet. Ravel was miffed and the two never collaborated again. Ravel made a two-piano reduction and transcribed the music for one piano, but this later version is very difficult to play. It seems to be this version that Ji played. Ji was at home with Ravel's expressive harmonies and unique textures, as the whirlwind picture of the waltz spread. The audience gave Ji and this brilliant performance yet another standing ovation leading to a short encore—a song by Robert Schumann in a paraphrase by Franz Liszt.