



Sang-Eun Lee, cellist

The Washington Post

Young cellist makes a strong Kennedy Center debut

Robert Battey | *Washington Post* | November 19, 2015

Cellist Sang-Eun Lee made a strong, sturdy Kennedy Center debut Wednesday, her 22d birthday. Although she is still a student at the Curtis Institute of Music, Lee has been playing around the world for nearly a decade (and won the Johansen International Competition here in 2009). Her performance at the Terrace Theater had major backing – Young Concert Artists, Washington Performing Arts and the Korean Concert Society – and Lee validated all the support. She is a prodigiously talented, and interesting, young artist.



Sang-Eun Lee made a strong Kennedy Center debut this week. (Matt Dine)

The program – heavy duo-sonatas by Brahms (No. 1) and Rachmaninoff, the Stravinsky/Piatigorsky “Suite Italienne” and the Solo Sonata by George Crumb – could have had more variety, and Lee will need to show more range to sustain a professional career. But this repertoire highlighted her powerful technique and musical poise. Her fingers seem to have little magnets that guide them to the right spots on the fingerboard every time, and her accuracy and control of double-stops in the Stravinsky and Crumb were amazing. In the latter, Lee made a meal of the second movement, each variation sharply characterized but with perfect rhythm throughout.

In lyrical passages, Lee is more of a jeweler than an architect. She responds naturally to the ebb and flow of the music, and offers some original ideas. Her bow arm can float lovely pianissimos and launch heavy artillery.

Pianist Noreen Polera has enhanced many cello recitals here over the years, at times even outshining the headliner. Although it was a mistake to fully raise the piano lid for the Rachmaninoff (balance was perfect in the Brahms, with the small stick), her playing remains a model of scrupulous professionalism.