



Sang-Eun Lee, cellist



Young Concert Artists: Sang-Eun Lee/Noreen Polera

Philip Gardner | Oberon's Grove | December 16, 2015

Tuesday December 15th, 2015 - Young Concert Artists presenting cellist Sang-Eun Lee with pianist Noreen Polera at Merkin Hall. Their imaginative programme was thoroughly pleasing, and well-received by the audience.

Igor Stravinsky's *Suite Italienne* for cello and piano is an arrangement of several movements from the composer's ballet *Pulcinella* (1919-1920). Mlles. Lee and Polera gave the *Suite* a generously witty and charming treatment. Ms. Lee may have been a trifle nervous at the start, but her voice was soon singing with ample confidence. The virtuosic demands of the *Suite's* faster movements were delivered with clarity and accuracy by the 22-year-old cellist, and Ms. Polera was an ideal accomplice in this *tour de force* opening work.

Composer George Crumb, born in 1929, is still with us. Composed in Berlin in October of 1955, his solo Cello Sonata dates from the composer's student days. This sonata is something of a test piece for the cellist, and Ms. Lee passed with flying colours. At first alternating plucking motifs with passages of melody, the music turns whimsical and requires a nimble technique. More plucking, this time *pianissimo*, gives way to a pensive song which grows more passionate. This in turn evolves into some scampering virtuosity. Ms. Lee won the crowd's hearty approval for her expert handling of this demanding music.

The atmosphere in the hall was most congenial as the two women returned for the Brahms Sonata no. 1 in E minor, Op. 38, in which the musical rapport between cellist and pianist gave their playing a heartfelt quality. Ms. Lee's tone was at its richest as she presented the deep opening theme, soon taken up by Ms. Polera's piano with an appealing warmth of expression. The two instruments slip in and out of registers to create an intimate, entwined effect: the cello may be singing bass to the piano's soprano at one moment, only to find the cello ascending and the piano playing in the more central octaves the next.

The sonata's second movement, a melancholic *Allegretto quasi Menuetto*, has a slightly ironic tinge at first. Passions rise in a sort of *valse triste* which grows dreamier before ending with a gentle remark. The concluding *Allegro* seems to be full of spirit and energy, yet there's a lovely "slow-down" near the end. Throughout the Brahms, we could revel in the polished playing of our two artists.

Following the interval, we were treated to a big-scale, passionate performance of the Rachmaninoff Sonata in G minor, Op. 19. It was in the ensuing Andante that the joint playing of Mlles. Lee and Polera soared on expressive wings. This movement begins with the pianist intoning a deeply lovely theme of intimate tenderness. Once the cello enters, the movement proceeds to build to a powerful climax before subsiding to a gentle murmur. The final *Allegro mosso* features yet another familiar theme and carries both players to the Rachmaninovian heights. At the sonata's brilliant conclusion, shouts of "brava!" rang thru the hall.

Mr. Lee then offered an encore: Gabriel Fauré's haunting "Après un rêve" in which her perfumed playing was ideally matched by Ms. Polera's evocative phrasing at the Steinway. This delicious encore was a perfect ending to a very enjoyable concert.

