



NEWS *from Young Concert Artists, Inc.*

Tonia Ko, *composer*

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Repartee and Revelations From Young Concert Artists on the Upper West

by delarue

Is it fair to a duo act to say that the highlight of their concert involved only one of them? In this case, that's a reflection of the material on the bill rather than the performance. The piece was Tonia Ko's mesmerizing Waves and Remains for Solo Violin; the player was Benjamin Baker, at Merkin Concert Hall this past evening.

The composer introduced it as an illustration of how clouds passing across the sky metaphorically reflect the transitory nature of home, and whether it's actually possible to go back. Strumming, she explained, reminds her of her Hawaiian childhood, and that's how Baker opened the work, tersely, then shifted to steady, circling phrases that interpolated pizzicato accents within them. The device can be maddeningly difficult to play, cleanly – Baker made it seem effortless. Ko's increasingly uneasy series of waves and echo devices rose to a very amusing, atonal paraphrase of a well-known nursery rhyme at the end.

Baker and his frequent tourmate, pianist Daniel Lehardt, also had great fun with Britten's Suite for Piano and Violin, Op. 6. Their playful jabs during the call-and-response of the opening march segment were matched by the more lingering, lyrical camaraderie that the composer artfully shifts to in the second movement, and also in the third, almost a parody of a minuet.

There were two other pieces on the bill as well. The duo opened the show with the slow upward trajectory of Schubert's Fantasy in C Major, D. 934, Lehardt attacking the recurrent series of rapidfire, tremoloing phrases with remarkable restraint, leaving the floor to Baker for a display of pensive grace and silken, high harmonics. And yet, Baker couldn't resist sliding just a hair toward the feral blue notes of Hungarian folk music when Schubert's faux-Romany dance kicked in.

They closed with the predictable High Romantic angst of Elgar's Sonata for Violin and Piano in E Minor, a post-World War I reflection that's hardly the match for, say, what Bartok or Ullmann had to say about it, but the crowd enjoyed the whole thing. The takeaway from this show, staged by Young Concert Artists, seemed to be "these guys are going to do pretty much everything a classical musician is required to do in 2018." This performance ultimately revealed as much about a professional friendship as it did the two musicians' formidable chops.

The Young Concert Artists series has helped launch the careers of a similarly formidable list of players, including but not limited to Pinchas Zuckerman, Richard Goode and Dawn Upshaw. Ko happens to their latest composer-in-residence: based on this piece, they chose spectacularly well. The next performance on this season's schedule is at the Morgan Library at noon on Feb 7 with oboist Olivier Stankiewicz and pianist Jonathan Ware playing an all-French program of works by Poulenc, Dorati, Saint-Saens and Sancan; cover is \$20 including museum admission.