

Lucid Culture

JAZZ, CLASSICAL MUSIC AND THE ARTS IN NEW YORK CITY

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Classical Accordionist Hanzhi Wang Brings Darkly Dynamic New Nordic Compositions to Carnegie Hall

Hanzhi Wang isn't the first accordionist to specialize in new classical music, but she is the first-ever squeezebox player to earn inclusion on the **Young Concert Artists** roster. Even though more composers these days are writing for the accordion, that's still a pretty big deal. Wang has a magically dynamic album of concise new works by Nordic composers, *On the Path to H.C. Andersen*, streaming at **Spotify**. She's making her Carnegie Hall debut on Oct 22 at 8:30 PM in Zankel Hall, playing works by Bach, Gubaidulina, Moszkowski, Piazzolla and Martin Lohse. Along with this past summer's Bryant Park Accordion Festival – and maybe **Golden Fest**, which always has plenty of accordion music – this is THE big accordion event of the year in New York.

The first composition is **Lohse's** Menuetto, a steady, Philip Glass-ine, austere waltzing theme punctuated by airy, rather still interludes, growing more uneasy as its distantly baroque-tinged, cell-like variations rise and then recede.

Lohse's triptych *Passing* begins with a similarly circling if almost marionettishly pulsing allegro section. The steady, moonlit waltz that follows is deliciously ominous; the concluding variation is 180 degrees the opposite until that same resonance is artfully interpolated amidst the starry, flitting optimism. Wang's precision, all the way through a persistent strobe effect, is striking.

A final Lohse piece, *The Little Match Girl* begins with sparse, Ligeti-esque syncopation and expands from there: the central theme reminds of the old English folk tune *Scarborough Fair*. Wang has gone on record as having a close personal connection to its persistent melancholy since it reminds her of her first solitary days and weeks as a Chinese accordion student abroad for the first time in Denmark.

She negotiates the twisted turns and sudden bursts of *Jabberwocky*, by Jesper Koch with carnivalesque vigor and finesse. The creepiest number here is *Tears*, by Bent Lorentzen, building to from ethereal suspense to phantasmagorical *Flight of the Bumblebee* clusters, murky low atmospheric and poltergeist accents bursting in from the shadows.

Wang concludes the album with **Svend Aaqvist's** practically fifteen-minute *Saga Night*, which quickly becomes a dissociatively eerie, rhythmically challenging fugue. A heroic theme is alluded to but never hit head-on; then a variation on the opening quasi-fugue makes an enigmatic return. In a way, it's practically a synopsis of the album as a whole. While some of these pieces could conceivably be played on organ or by a string ensemble, nothing beats the plaintive lushness of Wang's instrument of choice.

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