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Review: 2010 IVCI Gold Medalist Clara-Jumi Kang plays with the East Coast Chamber Orchestra



Written by [Laurie Niles](#)

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The sun came out Tuesday afternoon in Indianapolis...



...and 2010 IVCI Gold Medalist [Clara-Jumi Kang](#) also came back to town, to perform in concert with the East Coast Chamber Orchestra (ECCO) at Butler University's Schrott Center for the Arts.



Clara-Jumi Kang after the concert with me

The evening was full of energy, solid playing and appealing works.

The program began with Grieg's "Holberg Suite" played by ECCO, a conductorless chamber group with members who are known outside of the group as soloists, concertmasters, recording musicians and award-winners. (For example, violinist Nicolas Kendall of [Time for Three](#), soloist and recitalist [Tai Murray](#), 2014 [Primrose Viola Competition](#) third-place laureate Cong Wu, and that's just to name a few!) ECCO also will accompany the Finalists in the IVCI as they play their Classical Finals Wednesday and Thursday.

As I was speaking to members of the audience before the concert, one commented that she was looking forward to hearing the "Holberg Suite" played well, as this well-known piece gets too many tortured readings by lesser groups, perhaps with help from overzealous conductors.

She was right, this young and vibrant ensemble gave the "Holberg" drive and made it ring. As I listened to the familiar second movement, which seems to weep, sigh and revel in its own beauty, I thought about the fact that much of the modern world favors much harder edges these days: clashing sounds over smooth, harsh rap over singing melody, in-your-face conflict over sentimentality. But something like the "Holberg" is such a soft pillow, is there a place for it in this hard world? I think so. I think it's a reminder that under the cement floors, the steel structures, the wired walls and the flat screens through which we increasingly view the world, there is still the soft earth, and there is still life in the third dimension.

The musicians of ECCO play without fear or hesitation and with astonishing synchronicity, without a conductor. Let's say they watch the road while they're driving, they aren't constantly checking the GPS screen. Actually they do a bit more than watch one another; they breathe together, move together and seem to feel this music together.

Clara-Jumi Kang joined the group for Piazzolla's "Four Seasons of Buenos Aires" -- and apparently she is the first soloist to collaborate with ECCO. Elegant in a black-blue dress, Clara-Jumi brought her own intensity to this piece, which is constantly turning corners, from sultry and full of slides, to urban and ghostlike, back around to a driving rhythm. She played the 1725 "ex-Moeller" del Gesu, on loan from the Samsung Music Foundation, Korea. Here and there along the South American soundscape are scraps of Vivaldi that Piazzolla threw in -- call it Vivaldi deconstructed. Cellist Michael Nicolas played a stand-out solo -- silky and well-spun -- in the "Autumn" movement. The last movement, Spring, begins with a kind of tango fugue, and soloist and ensemble build and build and go and go. What energy!



After intermission, ECCO played Tchaikovsky's "Serenade for Strings," which the group also recorded in 2012. (It is a nice recording, [check it out](#). It also has a version of "La Follia" by Geminiani which is wonderful listening for any Suzuki Book 6 student, or anyone who likes that piece, for that matter!)

As members of ECCO returned to the stage, I noticed that everyone took a different place. Not only do they stand for their entire performances (all but the cellos, of course), but they also rotate and take turns as section principals and concertmaster. Their playing was fun, it was convincing, and in the second-movement "Valse" I wondered if they might just start dancing with each other, but then I realize: no need. They are dancing with their instruments!



Members of the East Coast Chamber Orchestra