

Jay Harvey Upstage

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Bronze medalist in 2014 IVCI returns to Indiana History Center in the Laureate Series



Ji Young Lim

The romantic violin is in good hands with a crowd of top violinists active currently, the tradition having been notably sustained and energized by Hoosier native Joshua Bell.

Ji Young Lim showed Tuesday night in a Laureate Series recital with pianist Chih-Yi Chen that she is in the top tier of those claiming a part of that revival. The four works she and Chen played for the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis in the Basile Theater of the Indiana History Center provided the opportunity to focus on the seductive appeal of the romantic approach applied to the core repertoire.

The main focus illustrated by Lim's approach is a flexible, intuitive manner with dynamics and tempo that enlivens the music. A case in point: A recording I own by a recently deceased violinist of considerable fame convinced me as I prepared for this recital that Franz Schubert's Rondo for Violin and Piano in B minor is a kind of potboiler — all about the "wow" factor with not much of musical substance to offer.

The performance that Lim and Chen delivered Tuesday changed my mind. As the opening work of the Laureate Series concert, the Rondo performance thrust the main theme forward in a sprightly, buoyant fashion. There was a lot of subtlety in how Lim managed her tone. There was superior coordination with the pianist in making dynamic variety the key to pushing to the fore question-and-answer passages. The duo lifted the work in my estimation, in that they made sure the music would not seem to be all about display.

The substantial middle of the recital — a piece on each side of intermission — consisted of sonatas by near-contemporaries Edvard Grieg and Johannes Brahms. The Grieg's expansive first movement (Sonata in C minor, op. 45) made the most of the way the work repeatedly gathers its forces after brief lulls. The renewed charges always had something fresh to say. Among the the well-judged movement endings characteristic of the recital was the hushed, placid conclusion of the "Allegretto espressivo alla Romanza."

In Brahms' Sonata No. 3 in D minor, Lim and Chen made common cause with warmth and flexibility in the first movement. The middle two were fully characterized; nothing was offhand, nor did it err in the other direction of

inflexible competence. As exciting as the finale was, as the movement progressed, the wildness became a little woolly. But this was the only time the performance almost verged out of control.

It was refreshing to have Jenő Hubay's version of a showpiece on Bizet's *Carmen* to end the recital. It largely chooses much different themes to emphasize in a different order from what Pablo Sarasate and Franz Waxman came up with. The dire consequences of the gypsy's unfaithfulness are soulfully put forth at the start, with the fate motive uppermost. After the habanera, music associated with Escamillo, the toreador, provides the climactic material. Figuration for the violin was tossed off by Lim, as the pianist stated the Toreador Song melody. Harmonics and trills are quite prominent in Hubay's setting, and Lim was fully up to the task of making these technical flourishes shine.

Called back for an encore, Lim and Chen presented an old-fashioned bit of virtuoso Americana, William Kroll's "Banjo and Fiddle," an evocation of homegrown popular music from long before its excessive commercialization. It was a treat to hear a brief, lighthearted showpiece after a recital so rewardingly loaded with substantial repertoire.