

Ed Keane
Associates

January 2005
Atlanta Audio Society

Stunning debut recital by Hong

Scarlatti. Brahms. Debussy. Stravinsky. Listening to the debut recital on CD by Los Angeles-born, Julliard-educated Alpin Hong, an interesting picture came to my mind. I visualized the sort of feat a master juggler will sometimes set for himself, keeping four objects of dissimilar weight, shape, and texture - say, a rubber ball, an Indian club, a pineapple, and a bowling ball - in motion all at once. Without deciding which of our famous composers is going to play the role of the pineapple, I will say that Hong's range of interests as a young concert artist on the rise is likewise impressive.

The two Scarlatti selections are a contrasted pair: the diabolical Sonata in D Minor, L422, with its rapid-fire repetitive keys, leaps, and hand-crossings, and the Sonata in B minor, L33, with its poignant intimacy that seems almost to anticipate the Romantic Era. The Brahms selections are likewise choice: the six Klavierstücke, Op. 118. While young keyboard artists are apt to make a name for themselves with a killer technical prowess, Alpin Hong's Brahms shows us that, at the highest level, technique and the inmost understanding of the emotion in a work of music, what we are pleased to call "feeling," are really inseparable. These pieces may be impassioned, like Intermezzo No.1, or exquisitely tender like the Intermezzo No. 2, marked Andante teneramente and unforgettable once you have heard it. Joy, sorrow, and longing are found in abundance in Op. 118, perhaps the most far ranging of all Brahms' collections of piano pieces.

If you have never heard more of Claude Debussy's Suite Bergamasque than the famous third piece, Claire de lune (Moonlight), you owe it to yourself to hear an inspired performance such as we have here. The other three movements, titled Prélude, Menuet, and Passepiéd, seem like some idealized Baroque suite as seen through Hong's poetic sensibility.

The final section of the recital, Stravinsky's Three Movements from Petrouchka, provides enough pianistic fireworks to show us why Alpin Hong was First Prize Winner at the 2001 Concert Arts Guild International Competition. With its powerful motor rhythms, complex counter rhythms, exotic harmonies, and orchestral-like writing for the piano, the Petrushka music writes a stunning finis to any recital. Hong really gets into the final movement, The Shrovetide Fair, eight of the most purely strenuous minutes in the pianist's repertoire!