



The International Violin Competition of Indianapolis Presents Jinjoo Cho, Violin, in Review

THE INTERNATIONAL VIOLIN COMPETITION OF INDIANAPOLIS PRESENTS JINJOO CHO JINJOO CHO, VIOLIN; HYUN SOO KIM, PIANO STERN AUDITORIUM/PERELMAN STAGE AT CARNEGIE HALL, NEW YORK, NY JUNE 9, 2016

Violinist Jinjoo Cho is a discovery. Well, to be fair, she was discovered as 2014 Gold Medalist at the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis, one of the most prestigious violin competitions in the world – and before that, at the 2006 Montreal International Music Competition (winning at age 17), and at quite a few other venues worldwide. I had not heard her though, and despite being spoiled from decades of hearing great violin playing (from over a century if one counts recordings), I was completely won over. Ms. Cho has it all – brilliant technique, musicality, passion, intelligence, flair, and an engaging stage presence. It is always exciting to hear an important debut at Carnegie Hall, but when a young performer “knocks one out of the park” as they say, it is simply electrifying. Her excellent collaborator, Hyun Soo Kim, deserves high praise as well.

First off, the recital gets high marks for programming. Ms. Cho demonstrated her commitment to living composers by featuring (along with well-loved works by Robert Schumann, Clara Schumann, and Franz Waxman) solo works by Joan Tower (b. 1938) and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich (b. 1939) – both present to take a bow – as well as the formidable Sonata for Violin and Piano by John Corigliano (b. 1938). Mr. Corigliano may or may not have been present, but one hopes he will hear a recording of this duo’s sensational rendition of his work.

Fittingly, Ms. Cho opened her entire program with Joan Tower’s *String Force*, commissioned by the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis as the compulsory work for the sixteen semifinalists in their 2010 competition and dedicated to the contest’s director Jaime Laredo. It is an all-out exploration of the power of a single string instrument, sometimes reminiscent of Bach’s great D minor Chaconne in idiom but in an overall twentieth-century, sometimes Bartókian, language. It was a great introduction to this young violinist, who needs no accompaniment to keep her audience riveted – and needed no score either, a powerful statement of commitment that stands out from the usual.

Musicians often fall into niches, whether modern, “early”, neo-Romantic, etc., so somehow Ms. Cho’s program emphasis on contemporary composers did not prepare me for her exceptional Schumann performances that followed. One might peg her as a Romantic solely on the basis of them, if one had not just witnessed her mastery of much newer fare. First came the *Three Romances for Violin and Piano*, Op. 22 by Clara Schumann, played with devotion and beautifully sensitive phrasing. Next was Robert Schumann’s Sonata in D minor, Op. 121 (reviewed in another violinist’s recital less than two weeks ago), also superb. With the easy flow that is possible only when the technical elements have become effortless, the piece soared. Especially refreshing was Ms. Cho’s grasp of its sprawling shape and maintaining of momentum accordingly. The old saying, “If everything is important, nothing is important,” is key in interpreting this work, but Ms. Cho knew how to prioritize. One mishap with the violin (a peg slipping?) necessitated a complete halt to the first movement to retune, an unnerving occurrence at a debut, but both musicians appeared unfazed. Mr. Kim fared admirably, though one did want to feel more from him

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through much of the Schumann Sonata. For this listener there was occasionally too much the sound of “accompaniment” rather than full collaboration. This is not a matter of tonal balance, but more a matter of musical presence; that changed, however, as the evening progressed. Incidentally, the piano lid was up on the full stick – as I wish were more common occurrence – and it never overwhelmed the violin. Skillful pianists know how to cope with the full stick, and Mr. Kim is one of them.

Ellen Taaffe Zwilich’s *Fantasy for Solo Violin* opened the second half. Another *tour de force* for the soloist, this work presents the full gamut technical challenges (like the Tower work) but has more of an extroverted “Americana” feel to it, with a freewheeling, fiddler’s feel at times. It suited Ms. Cho to a tee. As a side note, if one were not paying attention to its date of composition (2014), one might think one was reading the program notes twice, because this, like the Tower piece, was commissioned by the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis as the compulsory work for the sixteen semifinalists, and was also dedicated to Jaime Laredo, with the same sponsor. As Ms. Cho studied with Jaime Laredo (among other teachers) it seemed fitting to showcase both pieces, although it was very generous considering the demands on the violinist’s stamina. It was also played from memory.

Speaking of stamina, Ms. Cho’s was mind-boggling. The Corigliano Sonata followed. This Sonata is an established part of the violin repertoire by now, having been composed in 1963, but Cho’s energetic performance made it brand new for this listener. For full disclosure, to say I love this piece would be an understatement – I am completely smitten by it – but Ms. Cho captured its fire and lyricism especially wonderfully. Special kudos here must go to the pianist, Hyun Soo Kim, who was the partner extraordinaire, handling fistfuls of notes at lightning speed and dovetailing perfectly even through some devilishly tricky ensemble challenges.

One could have easily ended the recital here, but the showy Waxman *Carmen Fantasie* finished things off with a flourish. Calls of “brava” (including my own) were met with two Gershwin-Heifetz encores, “*Summertime*” and “*It Ain’t Necessarily So*.” Frankly, these seemed a bit rushed – I’d rather hear one played deliciously than two crammed in – but to avoid that special place in purgatory for nitpicking reviewers, one can chalk it up to the impatience of youth.

As a postscript, anyone in the music world could not miss the debates over “fairness” in the Indianapolis jury’s 2014 decision (an issue endemic to music contests, but well-addressed by this contest’s administration). Speaking only about the debut, what I heard showed preternatural gifts, phenomenal stamina, and passionate commitment; to possess all of these may indeed be unfair (apart from the hard work), but evidently the disgruntled will need to take their complaints up with a higher power. Seriously, one is thankful that Ms. Cho has risen above it all to do great things – may she rise farther!



by [Rorianne Schrade](#) for New York Concert Review; New York, NY

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