

Sweet Lyricism From Cellist Hee-Young Lim

The young South Korean cellist Hee-Young Lim won her first competition at the tender age of 11 and has been racking up honors ever since.

It's little wonder. As she showed at the Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater on Saturday night, Lim, now 20, is a deeply gifted musician with a full, singing tone, near-flawless technique and a natural lyricism that infused virtually every note she played.

Performing entirely from memory, Lim clearly had little use for the theatricality that other wunderkinder often indulge in; in fact, she seemed almost self-effacing onstage, and her playing always favored elegance over indulgence. At first, she almost seemed too well behaved; Boccherini's Sonata in A, No. 6, which opened the program, was decorous to a fault. But she quickly moved into more complex depths with Debussy's Sonata for Cello and Piano in D Minor — a mercurial, elegantly savage work that she brought off with insight and quiet power.

But it was Lim's exceptional sense of lyricism that marked the evening, whether in her beautifully shaded account of Schumann's Adagio and Allegro, Op. 70, or (rather surprisingly) the aggressive and edgy Sonata for Solo Cello from 1955 by George Crumb. And when she put her full interpretive powers on display — as she did in Shostakovich's Sonata for Cello and Piano in D Minor, Op. 40 — it all came together beautifully in an imaginative, robust and vibrant reading of this wonderful work.

Accompanied with style by pianist Noreen Cassidy-Polera, Lim gave ample evidence that she's an artist to keep an eye on. Kudos to the Korean Concert Society, which continues to find and showcase promising young musicians like this.



Lim played elegantly at the Terrace.

— Stephen Brookes