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New York Concerti Sinfonietta Focuses on Ireland

Winners from Emerald Isle and other locales sparkle

By Michael Sherwin | May 14, 2015



NEW YORK—A dazzling array of superb, award-winning musicians was on display at Carnegie Hall’s Weill Recital Hall on May 3, as the New York Concerti Sinfonietta presented the First Prize winners of its 2015 International Shining Stars Competition.

Dr. Julie Jordan, who is celebrating her 30th anniversary teaching in The Juilliard School Evening Division, is the founder and artistic director of the Sinfonietta and its international competitions.

The Irish Connection

It has been said that Dr. Jordan, an accomplished pianist, “has a talent for finding talent.” [A feature article in the May 1, 2015](#) issue of the Epoch Times was devoted to her activities.

Such was the plethora of talent discovered by Dr. Jordan that two supplemental concerts were necessary to fully display all the prizewinners.

The May 3 Carnegie concert exhibited the first fruits of her new association with the Royal Irish Academy of Music in Dublin. Dr. Jordan traveled to Ireland to audition 40 prospective candidates for debut awards, with the cooperation of famed pianist John O'Connor, former director of the Royal Irish Academy and current director, Deborah Kelleher.

Such was the plethora of talent discovered by Dr. Jordan that two supplemental concerts were necessary to fully display all the prizewinners, including winners from the United States, Europe, and Asia. The additional concerts were given at historic Upper West Side churches: Rutgers Presbyterian (May 4) and St. Gregory the Great (May 5).

Precocious Prodigies and Profound Interpreters

A number of diminutive child prodigies were among the winners. Their performances were impressively mature, exhibiting a technical command of their instruments and an expressive comprehension of the music that was startling coming from musicians so young.

At the opposite pole, a number of the more experienced competition winners delivered truly profound interpretations of Golden Age quality.

Accomplished Orchestra and Conductor

Inevitably there was some duplication of repertoire. No fewer than four cellists chose to play portions of the Elgar Concerto. It was notable how the top-flight, 40-piece professional orchestra, the New York Concerti Sinfonietta, and its responsive and supportive conductor, Paul Hostetter, instantly adapted to widely varying interpretative approaches on the part of the soloists with respect to tempos, dynamics, and balances.

Maestro Hostetter was a musical chameleon in his ability to rapidly mirror the soloists' divergent concepts and faithfully partner them throughout. In addition, the quality of the orchestra's wind section was particularly admirable, as evidenced by the many mellifluous flute, clarinet, and oboe solos.

Piano Prodigy

Nine-year-old Joe O'Grady, from the Royal Irish Academy, began the Carnegie concert by playing the "Allegretto" finale of Mozart's delectable Piano Concerto No. 12 in A Major, K. 414, one of his earliest piano concertos to endure in the repertoire.





Joe O'Grady, piano student of John O'Connor, former director of the Royal Irish Academy of Music.
(Mark Minaly)

Joe, who is just tall enough to reach the pedals, started with a crisp, perky statement of the theme. His fluent account displayed shapely phrasing, nicely contoured dynamics, and a surprisingly robust tone, evident in the forceful accents of his extended cadenza.

Two Outstanding Cellists

Two cellists appeared on the first half of the Carnegie program. Killian White played the opening movement of the Dvorak Concerto in B Minor, Op. 104, while Emirhan Tunca performed the first movement of the Elgar Concerto in E Minor, Op. 85.

White, who is studying at the Royal Irish Academy, played the Dvorak with a warm, burnished tone that was as beautiful as the color of the reddish-brown wood on the front of his cello.





Killian White, a First Prize winner from the March auditions at the RIAM, makes his Carnegie Hall debut performing the Dvorak Cello Concerto, with the New York Concerti Sinfonietta on May 3, 2015. (Mark Minaly)

Commencing with the authoritative statement of the opening theme, he gave a commanding performance, with rock-solid intonation. Demonstrating interpretative individuality, he maximized the work's songful qualities, establishing a mood of hushed reverie in the quieter passages.

He considerably dropped back in volume for accompanimental passagework so as to allow thematic material in the woodwinds to be heard, in a manner that is altogether rare in the hands of more egotistical players.

Tunca, who is from Istanbul, Turkey, studies with Marion Feldman at the NYU Steinhardt School. He played the first movement of the Elgar Concerto with deep, rich tone. His performance was rhapsodic and ruminative, while avoiding sentimentality. His somewhat inward concept was dignified in its restraint, seeming to avoid British "Nobilimente" in favor of something more universal. He played with affecting portamentos and accurate intonation over the entire range of the instrument, up to the very highest registers.





First Prize Winner in the 2015 Shining Stars series, Emirhan Tunca, debuts at Carnegie Hall with Elgar's Cello Concerto solo with the New York Concerti Sinfonietta. (Mark Minaly)

Maestro Hostetter supported his interpretation with a weighty, solemn orchestral sonority of utmost gravity. Tunca ended the movement on a memorably somber note.

On May 4 and 5, Tunca turned from his May 3 solo responsibilities to do double-duty by anchoring the New York Concerti Sinfonietta cello section as principal cellist.

Virtuoso Clarinetist

Carl Maria von Weber's chief claim to immortality is the half-dozen works he composed for clarinet. One of the most popular and attractive of these, the Concertino in E-flat Major, Op. 26, was performed at the Carnegie concert by Christopher Moriarty-Pearson.

Moriarty-Pearson, who is in his third year of studies at the Royal Irish Academy, also composes. He demonstrated full mastery of his instrument. Opening with a beautifully shaded, long lyric line like an operatic singer, he went on to display fluid technique, excellent control of dynamics, and agility as he darted between low and high registers. Enlivening the solo line through judicious placement of accents, he dispatched the rapid scales and arpeggios with élan and virtuoso flair, bringing the work to an ebullient conclusion.





Christopher Moriarty-Pearson, a First Prize Debut Winner from The Royal Irish Academy of Music, studies with John Finucane of the National Symphony Orchestra. He performed Weber's Concertino for Clarinet and Orchestra. (Mark Minaly)

Transcendent Tchaikovsky and Beguiling Fiddling

Mairéad Hickey is an exceptional talent. Her mercurial finale of the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 35, was magical, penetrating to the heart and soul of the music. A native of Cork, Ireland, she is now studying in Germany. She was a firebrand, setting a blistering pace, displaying a sultry and insinuating lower register, suddenly morphing into a Cossack-inspired dance. The rapid passages were gossamer, the octaves and fingered harmonics unusually pure.



Mairéad Hickey's mercurial finale of the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 35 was magical. (Mark Minaly)

As an encore, she played two unaccompanied Irish Jigs, "Apples in Winter" and "The Gold Ring." Hickey has eight All-Ireland fiddle titles, and has devised an instructional "Irish Fiddler" app for iTunes.

Her solo Irish encores displayed such authenticity and rhythmic verve as to be utterly beguiling. On May 5 she also performed two Irish Reels, capping her appearance with a heartfelt and deeply expressive interpretation of the opening Adagio from Bach's Sonata No. 1 in G Minor for solo violin that plumbed the depths of this transcendental music.

Its conclusion—an achingly prolonged and perfectly controlled diminuendo on a single note—seemed to resonate into infinity. Her Bach evoked memories of the great violinist Henryk Szeryng.

Jazz Legend Improvises

The May 3 concert featured not a debut artist but a genuine jazz legend, the phenomenal trombonist and vocalist Wycliffe Gordon.

Although the New York Concerti Sinfonietta has previously awarded prizes in the Jazz category (for example, to the Anderson Twins), the May 3 concert featured not a debut artist but a genuine jazz legend, the phenomenal trombonist and vocalist Wycliffe Gordon. He brought four members of his band, Adrian Cunningham, clarinet; Gabe Schnider, guitar; Yasushi Nakamura, bass; and Alvin Atkinson, Jr.; drums.



Jazz legend, trombonist and vocalist, Wycliffe Gordon joined by Adrian Cunningham on the clarinet solo with the New York Concerti Sinfonietta. (Mark Minaly)

Gordon played three sets, backed not only by his sidemen but by the entire New York Concerti Sinfonietta, ably led by Paul Hostetter. Gordon began with “Somebody New”; then did Vernon Duke’s/Gershwin’s “I Can’t Get Started,” both in arrangements by Jeff Tyzik. Lastly, he ended with his own inimitable arrangement of Spencer Williams’s “Basin Street Blues.”

Gordon played a mellow tenor trombone, as well as a miniature, trumpet-sized soprano trombone. On his low-pitched instrument, Gordon’s huge, resonant plush tone was like a comforting embrace or an immersion in a warm Jacuzzi.

Employing a flexible rubber mute that looked for all the world like the end of a toilet plunger, Gordon gave the muted trombone an articulateness approaching that of human speech. The timbres of Gordon’s muted slide instrument, heard in harmonic tandem with his duetting virtuoso clarinet partner who took his B-flat instrument up to an improbably high pitch, displayed an astonishing gamut of kaleidoscopic colors. Gordon brought down the house in “Basin Street Blues” by leading the orchestra and audience in singing the recurring refrain.

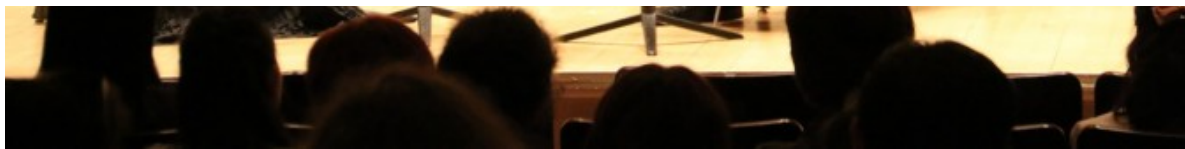
Post-Intermission Chamber Music

The orchestra was sent home at intermission, allowing the second half of the May 3 Carnegie concert to be devoted to chamber music.

Early Rachmaninoff

Rachmaninoff’s “Trio élégaique” No. 1 in G Minor, a rarity in the concert hall, is one of the composer’s earliest works, written when he was 19 and published posthumously. Consisting of a single movement, it was played here by a one-off trio assembled for the occasion, comprising Michael Davidman, piano; Hannah Tarley, violin; and Eddie Pogossian, cello.





Rachmaninoff's "Trio élégaique" performed by 2015 First Prize Winner Hannah Tarley, violin, with pianist Michael Davidman, MSM Precollege student headed for Curtis this fall, and cellist Eddie Pogossian, a Kovner Fellow at The Juilliard School. (Mark Minaly)

The three were well matched. Davidman gave a powerful, massive account of the thickly textured piano part on the Steinway 9-foot concert grand piano. The string players contributed beautifully shaded playing in the quiet passages, but stepped-up to match the assertiveness of the piano in the climaxes.

The following day, it was Hannah Tarley's turn in the spotlight. Tarley, who studied at the Colburn School in Southern California, recently graduated from the Royal College of Music in London. Her May 4 performance of the first movement of Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 4 in D Major, K. 218, was tonally glowing and radiant, maintaining its Classical framework but not slighting its expressive potential. She reveled in the work's melodic beauty, with many insightful subtleties of bowing, phrasing, and dynamics. Tarley played the Joachim cadenza. Her tasteful yet persuasive approach was reminiscent of the renowned Nathan Milstein.

Balletic Bach and Wienawski

Yurie Minamiya, born in Japan, was so petite that—dressed in a frilly pink full-length gown, capped by a white Grecian floral tiara—she looked like she could have just stepped out of a Renaissance Botticelli painting.



Yurie Minamiya plays Wieniawski with the New York Concerti Sinfonietta as a 2015 International

Kate Minamiya plays Wienawski with the New York Concert Symphony as a 2013 International Shining Star. (Mark Minaly)

Minamiya delivered a spirited, dance-like account of the opening Preludio of Bach's Partita No. 3 for solo violin. Her May 3 performance of the slow movement of Wienawski's Violin Concerto No. 2 with the fine pianist Eduard Laurel (followed on May 5 by the first movement of the same concerto with the entire orchestra), was played with real conviction and mastery of the Romantic style. She demonstrated rich—but not cloying—vibrato, soaring phrasing, virtuoso fingering, and well-tuned chording.

As if this was not already enough talent for one person, Minamiya dances with the Joffrey Ballet School and has been accepted to study at the Bolshoi Ballet Academy in Moscow.

Ghostly Beethoven

The newly constituted Julep Piano Trio concluded the May 3 Carnegie concert with Beethoven's Trio No. 5 in D Major, Op. 70, No. 1. It is nicknamed the "Ghost" due to its spooky-sounding, largely non-vibrato slow movement.

The members of this Taiwanese ensemble, now based in New York, are pianist Joy Chi Wang, violinist Chang-En Lu, and cellist Amber Yi-Wen Ho. They are off to a good start, showing an idiomatic grasp of Beethovenian style. The slow movement was eerie. In the work's contrapuntal passages, there was a nice ebb-and-flow in the way the motifs were handed-off from one instrument to another, but the players were heroic, emphatic, and brusque where Beethoven calls for it.



The Julep Piano Trio performs Beethoven's "Ghost" trio in Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. (Mark Minaly)

Additional Competition Winners

While it is not feasible to describe all the performances at the May 4 and May 5 supplemental concerts, four instrumentalists who were not heard on the May 3 Carnegie program deserve mention.

Two Cellists Share Elgar

Alexander Rohaytn previously appeared with the New York Concerti Sinfonietta at Carnegie in Nov. 2013, playing Popper with evident promise. In Feb. 2013, Sujari Britt brilliantly played the first two movements of the Elgar with the Sinfonietta at Carnegie, having performed at the White House for President Obama at the age of 8.

At the May 4 concert, Alexander—now 15—played the first two movements of the Elgar Concerto, showing noteworthy growth and development in tonal and technical resources; only the rapid passagework of the scherzo presented something of an intonational challenge.



On May 4th, Alexander Rohatyn, made his concerto debut with the New York Concerti Sinfonietta performing the Elgar Cello Concerto I, II. (Mark Minaly)

At the same concert, Sujari, who just turned 14 in April, performed the fourth movement finale of the Elgar with intensity and commitment, reinforcing the initial impression that she could be destined for a major career. Both cellists study with Marion Feldman at the Manhattan School of Music.



Sujari Britt solos with the New York Concerti Sinfonietta on May 5th as a 2015 International Shining Star concerto competition winner. (Mark Minaly)

Cello Prodigy Plays Haydn; Still More Elgar

On May 5, Ian Maloney played the second and third movements of the Haydn Concerto in C, while Lindsay Cheng was heard in the first movement of the Elgar Concerto. Ten-year-old Ian, who is not yet old enough to play a full-sized instrument, looked incongruously diminutive, but his interpretation and technique were surprisingly mature. His playing would be credible for someone twice his age. He played with real subtlety of phrasing and dynamics and reasonably reliable intonation. He showed aptitude for his instrument, precocious musical understanding, agility on the fingerboard, and well-articulated bowing.





2015 Shining Star First Prize debut winner, Ian Maloney, cello student of Madeline Golz at the Thurnauer School of Music in Tenafly, New Jersey, performed the Haydn Concerto in C Major at the Church of St. Gregory the Great. (Mark Minaly)

Lindsay Cheng, who studies with Marion Feldman at NYU, was one of three cellists to play the first movement of the Elgar Cello Concerto at these concerts. She more than held her own. The Elgar is a work that can accommodate—and benefit from—a variety of interpretative approaches. Cheng's concept was smaller-scaled and more intimate, introverted, and inward than usual. It was refreshing to hear it come across as a lyrical outpouring rather than a gloomy, stormy drama.



Lindsay Cheng, NYU student of Marion Feldman, wins debut with New York Concerti Sinfonietta, led

Liubov Cheng, NYC student of Markon Feldman, wins debut with New York Concerti Sinfonietta, led by Paul Hostetter, in 2015 International Shining Stars Concerto Competition performed on May 5, 2015. (Mark Minaly)

Michael Sherwin, a Rockefeller and Fromm Foundation Fellow in music criticism, currently writes for the Epoch Times, Wagner Notes, and other publications. He recently presented a “Tribute to Maestro Lorin Maazel” for the Wagner Society of New York at the Liederkrantz Foundation.

Winners of upcoming New York Concerti Sinfonietta auditions will make their debuts in Carnegie Hall’s 125th anniversary season on Oct. 11, 2015, and on June 3, 2016. Starting this summer, international auditions will be held annually in County Cork, Ireland; the Royal Irish Academy of Music in Dublin; the San Francisco Bay Area; Dallas, Texas; Orlando, Florida; and New York City. For information, or to apply for forthcoming competitions and debuts, contact dr.juliejordan1@gmail.com or www.newyorkconcertisinfonietta.com.

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