

**Oberlin Artist Recital Series:  
Jennifer Koh at Finney Chapel (April 12)**

by Mike Telin



There are many reasons to admire violinist Jennifer Koh. She possesses rock-solid technique and rhythm, impeccable intonation, and a tonal palette worthy of a master-painter. And her musical decisions are always intelligent and thoughtful. All of these attributes were on display when the dynamic violinist returned to her alma mater for a performance of her “Bach and Beyond Part III” program. The

concert on Sunday, April 12 in Finney Chapel was presented as part of Oberlin College and Conservatory’s Artist Recital Series.

Koh’s program, which could be sub-titled “Bach — Beyond — and Bach again,” featured four demanding unaccompanied works, beginning and ending with Bach. In Bach’s *Sonata No. 2 in A minor*, Koh quickly established a “wow” factor with her controlled playing of the opening Grave. During the fugue, Koh never lost track of the theme. Her sweet Andante, with its perfectly balanced harmonic line, gave way to a fiery allegro.

Luciano Berio’s *Sequenza VIII for solo violin* is a muscular work with a powerful impact. The music pulls, jerks, steps-on and tramples listeners, and Koh’s performance was mesmerizing. The exotic, muted ending of the work left you breathless. Never has music that beats you up sounded so good.

John Harbison’s *For Violin Alone* packs a more elegant punch, but like the Berio, it too is modeled after Bach’s partita form. Written in six movements — Ground, Dance I, Air, March, Dance 2, and Duet, plus Epilogue — the piece allowed Koh to show her

humorous musical side, and she did so with aplomb. The “Duet” was especially engaging. It sounded like two divas singing in perfect harmony but battling it out for the top prize.

The second half of the program consisted of a single work, Bach’s *Sonata No. 3 in C major*. Lasting around 25 minutes, it begins with a peaceful “Adagio” from which Koh transitioned beautifully into the complex “Fuga” based on the chorale Komm, heiliger Geist, Herr Gott. During this extensive movement, Bach uses such techniques as stretto, inversion and double counterpoint. Koh’s performance was brilliant. The “Largo” was heartfelt, and the concluding “Allegro assai” was reminiscent of a walk in the countryside.

Koh’s Bach and Beyond programs are so well-constructed that it is easy to recognize the connections between the pieces. A no-fuss player who gets the job done with elegance and panache, Jennifer Koh knows how to musically communicate with her audience, and she leaves you wanting more.

*Photo from Jennifer Koh’s previous recital in Finney Chapel by Roger Mastroianni.*

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com April 27, 2015.*

*Click here for a printable copy of this article*

[Return to the Front Page.](#)