

## Kent Blossom Music Festival: Kulas Guest Artist Jennifer Koh (June 28)

by Mike Telin



There are many reasons to admire violinist Jennifer Koh. She possesses virtuosic technique, an impressive bow-arm, impeccable intonation, a tonal palette worthy of a master-painter, and she has an astute understanding of complex musical structures. Above all, her musical decisions are always intelligent and thoughtful. These attributes were on display when the dynamic violinist performed a recital on Wednesday, June 28 in Ludwig Hall as part of the Kent Blossom Music Festival.

Her Kulas Guest Artist's program featured four demanding unaccompanied works. Beginning with Bach's *Sonata No. 2 in a*, Koh quickly established a "wow" factor with her controlled playing of the opening Grave. Her transitions during the Fuga were beautiful, and she tossed off the many thorny sting crossings with ease in her sweet interpretation of the Andante. Her perfectly balanced harmonic line gave way to a fiery account of the concluding Allegro.

Written in 2010, Missy Mazzoli's *Dissolve, O My Heart* was commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic for Koh's "Bach and Beyond" project. Although the stunning work references Bach's Partita in d, the only direct quote is the opening chord. Full of Gypsy-sounding slides, the piece spirals from the intense to the sublime, as did the violinist's captivating performance.

Pausing only to change scores, Koh proceeded directly into Luciano Berio's *Sequenza VIII*. Baroque in structure, the piece also pays homage to Bach, and Koh commanded attention during the work's powerful opening. In her hands, the soft, muted section was beautiful, like a lullaby. During the muscular, perpetual motion section, the music pulls,

jerks, and tramples listeners — Koh's performance was mesmerizing. The exotic, muted ending of the work left you breathless.

The second half of the program was dedicated to a single work, Bach's *Partita No. 2 in d*. The violinist perfectly captured the individual spirit of the four dance movements, creating lovely echoes in the Allemande, and going on to shape a lively Corrente, a meditative Sarabande and an impressively agile Gigue. Taking a winning approach to the *Chaconne*, Koh acknowledged its monumentality. Beginning it at a good clip, the violinist allowed the musical lines to unfurl naturally with a minimum of intervention. It was Bach who created its grand arch, but Koh brought it to life with both reverence and coherence. The *sotto voce* section following the return of the original theme was an edge-of-your-seats moment.

The capacity audience acknowledged the performance with a well-deserved ovation. And as much as we all would have liked to hear more, what more could have been said?

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com July 5, 2017.*

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