

Kent/Blossom Music Festival Faculty Recital: Ida Kavafian (July 3)

By Daniel Hautzinger



Ida Kavafian is clearly a devoted teacher. She serves on the faculty of the Curtis Institute of Music, Bard College Conservatory, and Juilliard, and was the Kent/Blossom Music Festival's Kulas Guest Artist this year, giving master classes and coachings to student musicians. As part of that residency, she gave a recital in Ludwig Recital Hall at Kent State University on July 3.

Kavafian's desire to aid the next generation of musicians was evident even while performing. While playing Chausson's *Concert for Violin, Piano and String Quartet in D* with guest pianist Yekwon

Sunwoo and the Glauser Quartet, she visibly encouraged the young quartet (the members are all students at the festival), amiably cueing and connecting with them. And when the Glauser hesitated to come out for an encore, leaving Kavafian and Sunwoo to enjoy the applause, she clucked at such nonsense and beckoned them back on stage like a proud mother.

Unfortunately the Chausson is an uninventive work, one of those unfortunate Wagner-indebted French pieces that constantly recycles the same theme and eschews the Gallic virtues of wit and transparency. Despite the rich textural possibilities of its instrumentation, the *Concert* consists mostly of melodramatic melodies over nonstop swooping accompaniment by the piano, with the string quartet playing either in unison or holding tremolo chords. As such, the piece is at its best when it approaches the magical lightness of Fauré in the "Sicilienne" second movement and the "Très animé" finale.

Kavafian is a powerhouse of a player. Her massive sound refuses to be covered, which allowed Sunwoo to whip through his ornate piano part, no holds barred. Mostly due to Chausson's unbalanced writing, the Glauser's parts were occasionally lost beneath the piano. Yet Samuel Huang and Yang Zeng, violins, Xiaohan Sun, viola, and Jeff Millen, cello performed admirably, their unisons especially tight. Sun's short solos rose above the waves of piano.

Pedagogy had a role in another piece on Thursday: Beethoven's *Violin Sonata No. 5 in F, op. 24* ("Spring"), which Kavafian described to my colleague Mike Telin as her "'go-to' sonata for students who haven't played a lot of Beethoven." (Read that interview [here](#)). Her dramatic range of tone matched Beethoven's sudden dynamic contrasts and playful accents, while Sunwoo's buoyant touch and understated left hand proved a pleasing counterweight to Kavafian's Romantic interpretation.

Richard Strauss's three movement *Violin Sonata in E-flat, op. 18*, provided robust melodies and textures for Kavafian's red-blooded playing. The piece blazes with the exuberance of E-flat major, a brilliant key often used for heroic works like Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony. Sunwoo dispatched the virtuosic piano part with ease — the outer movements' brazen exclamations and the second movement's dainty ornamentation were vivacious and flamboyant.

These days, Kavafian channels the passion of her violin playing into teaching more often than performing. This summer, Kent/Blossom was in the lucky position to experience both sides of her artistry.

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