

## CIPC to present duo pianists Ran Dank and Soyeon Lee

by Mike Telin



Life has been good for [Ran Dank](#) and [Soyeon Kate Lee](#) since they won medals at the Cleveland International Piano Competition in 2007 and 2003, respectively. Since those wins, both pianists have enjoyed successful careers as solo artists, as well as holding positions as Assistant Professors of Piano at the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.

This week Dank and Lee will showcase their skills as duo pianists when they return to Cleveland for a performance on Thursday, June 7 at 8:00 in Mixon Hall at the Cleveland Institute of Music. The concert is presented as part of the [Cleveland International Piano Competition for Young Artists](#), which began last week and runs through Saturday, June 9.

The Duo's program will include works by Mozart, Scriabin, Janáček, and Liszt as well as a four-hands version of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. "It's a special piece for us because we played it at our wedding concert in New York City," Lee said during a joint telephone call with Dank. "A wedding is sort of a rite," he added with a laugh. "But you can't quite call the piece an arrangement because parts of it were originally conceived for four hands. So in some ways, the orchestrated version is the arrangement in the same way Ravel would orchestrate his piano works."

Lee and Dank said listeners should keep in mind that the piano version is a different piece from its more famous orchestral sibling — the dissonances are even stronger and more pungent. "In some ways it sounds postmodern and in others more Romantic," Dank said. "It's usually played on two pianos — people choose to do that because there

are so many acrobatics and so much choreography to deal with in the four-hands medium. But we feel that the synergy is better and we like playing next to each other.”

How do they keep from colliding with one another? “It takes a long time to figure out,” Lee said. “Because there are so many notes to play, you have to start out by taking it slow. The pedaling also needs to be choreographed, and there are many passages that you can’t approach in a traditional pianistic sense — sometimes your wrist needs to be above the arm of the other person. There are many weird angles and sometimes you’re almost standing.”

The first half of the couple’s program is all about contrasts, beginning with Mozart’s four-hand *Sonata in B-flat*, which Dank described as a youthful work that is full of vibrant colors. “In general Mozart’s four-hand sonatas are little gems, but this is one of my favorites,” he said.

Lee will be featured during Scriabin’s *Prelude in f-sharp*, Op. 11, No. 8 and Janáček’s “Foreboding” and “Death” from *Sonata I.X.1905* (“From the Street”).

“Scriabin wrote these miniatures à la Chopin,” she said. “This is one of the darker, more mysterious ones, and it works nicely as an introduction to the brooding and tragic Janáček, which is the darkest piece on the program. Janáček was inspired to write it after seeing the violent death of a student/carpenter during a protest. It was originally a three-movement work, and we have no idea what happened to the third except that it was thrown into the river.”

Dank will round out the evening with Liszt’s “Sposalizio” from *Deuxième Année de Pèlerinage: Italie*, and *Polonaise No. 2 in E*. “Sposalizio is based on a painting by Raphael. It’s very peaceful and contemplative in nature and in many ways, it’s an introverted piece,” he said. “But the Polonaise is anything but introverted. Although Chopin’s Polonaises usually take center stage, Liszt did write two of them and this one is the more popular. It’s exuberant and has a wonderful middle section — Liszt utilizes the piano in a beautiful way.”

When they’re not concertizing, teaching, or parenting their two young children, Dank and Lee spend time managing their “pet project,” [Music by the Glass](#). “We started it in 2013 in New York City,” Lee said. “We thought of the title when we were ordering a glass of wine — it came to us that during Beethoven’s and Liszt’s time and even in the 1920s, concert programming was very different than it is today: playing movements of a work instead of an entire piece was accepted.”

Music by the Glass concerts are held at the [Louis K. Meisel Gallery](#), and with the assistance of a local wine merchant, each piece on the program is paired with wine. “A lot of concert series have wine or craft beers which is wonderful, but ours is unique because we take the pairings seriously,” Dank said. “We have someone who goes through the repertoire and chooses the wines that will yield the best experience.”

The pianists pointed out something else that’s unique to their organization: the board is made up entirely of young professionals in NYC. “It’s all people in their 30s and 40s who want to refuel the energy of classical music,” Lee said.

Were either of them wine connoisseurs prior to starting the series? “We liked wine but we weren’t connoisseurs,” Dank said. “Some people take their wine hobbies to a completely different level. But that’s why we have these experts who know a lot about wine and music, and their job is to find the optimal pairings.”

Winding down our conversation, I asked them if they have any memories about their time at the Cleveland International Piano Competition. “It was the first major international competition in which I received a prize, and it started a period when I did quite well in other competitions,” Dank said. “I remember that it was wonderfully organized, but the most memorable experience was playing with The Cleveland Orchestra in Severance Hall. I remember when we went there, we were all in awe at how beautiful it was.”

Lee said that she remembers being exhilarated by the sound of the Orchestra, but her experience was memorable for a very different reason. “Two weeks before the competition, I was in a serious car accident and was in the intensive care unit for a few days. So when I played, I didn’t treat it as a competition because I was so grateful to be alive and participating in this huge music festival. My entire experience — playing and meeting all the people who were involved with the competition — was quite special. But honestly, I don’t remember much except the joy I felt. Cleveland has a special place in my heart.”

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