

Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival: a recital by Hao Yang (June 4)

by Mike Telin



The presentation of young and emerging artists has always been a priority for the Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival. And for Festival followers it's an opportunity to be made aware of young guitarists, and then watch them mature as musicians.

In 2017 CICGF introduced Cleveland audiences to Hao Yang (China). “[She] attended two years ago as a student [and] impressed everyone with the way that she played in the master classes,” Festival founder and artistic director Armin Kelly recalled during an interview that year with this publication.

Since that time Yang has earned a BM from the Curtis Institute of Music, where she studied with Jason Vieaux and David Starobin, and won more than a few awards at international competitions. She is currently pursuing a graduate degree at the University of Denver.

On Sunday, June 4, Hao Yang returned to Cleveland to give the final recital at the 2023 CICGF. Her Mixon Hall performance opened with a vibrant interpretation of four movements from Alexandre Tansman's *Suite in modo polonico*. The guitarist has a special feel for Mazurkas, as was clear during “Kujawiak” (Mazurka lente) and “Oberek” (Mazurka vive). The “Kolysanka No. 2” (lullaby) was soothing.

As Festival program annotator Tom Poore notes, J.S. Bach's lute suites are notoriously unidiomatic, and his *Lute Suite in e*, BWV 996 is considered the least suited for the

instrument. Yang told the audience that the piece was most likely played on a *lautenwerck*, a cross between a keyboard and a lute. Though she took a few too many liberties with tempos within movements, her performance was full of color and character changes accompanied by an assured technique.

Closing the first half was Giulio Regondi's over-the-top paraphrase, *Air varie de l'opera de Bellini "I Capuleti e i Montecchi."* Yang's playful interpretation delightfully captured the bel canto tradition.

Although left unfinished at his death, Alan Rawsthorne's *Elegy* was later completed by Julian Bream. Here Yang appropriately captured the work's sadness and reflection — perhaps on a lover lost.

At this point in the afternoon, Hao Yang had firmly established herself as a technical wizard, which served her well during Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Sonata omaggio a Boccherini*. The opening "Allegro con spirito" was indeed spirited, the "Andantino, quasi canzone" charming. After the "Tempo di minuetto" the guitarist challenged herself to raise the speed limit another notch during the final "Vivo ed energico." Which she did without a sign of a technical blemish.

The enthusiastic crowd asked for more and Hao Yang accommodated with Isaac Albéniz's "Torre Bermeja" from *12 Piezas características*. Here she threw caution to the wind and the audience ate it up.

It's noteworthy that Jason Vieaux opened the Festival with "Torre Bermeja" and his student closed the 2023 edition with the same piece. As Armin Kelly would later say, "The work served as vibrant bookends to this year's Festival — a fitting and special touch."

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