



Child stars still shine

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Youth culture is old hat in classical music. Leopold Mozart banked his family's fortunes on it, sometimes lowering his son's age to make little Wolfgang seem even more precocious. A couple of centuries later, Mozart's public still loves a prodigy, even one grown old enough to drive a car and pay a mortgage. **On Thursday, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra offered two such former child wonders: pianist Stewart Goodyear and violist Teng Li.**

Goodyear, who was born in Toronto, made his debut with the TSO at age 12, in a movement from Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 21 in C major*. This week, he returned to play the whole piece, and though he's now 28, he still seemed very much like a boy-wonder of the keyboard.

Not many pianists of any age can improvise a couple of cadenzas in classical style, as he did in the concerto. He offered more of the same in the foyer at intermission, roaring through an elaborate arrangement of Strauss waltzes before riffing spontaneously on a theme (from Beethoven's *Fur Elise*) proposed by an audience member.

These hors d'oeuvre revealed the good-natured pianist to be a bit of a show-off, eager to display his flying fingers and his ability to run through as many modulations as possible. That kind of thing must have thrilled the grownups when he was 12, and it still does, three months after his wedding.

In the concerto proper, Goodyear held his virtuosity to just what was required, playing with precision and a watchful sense of balance. It was a tidy, well-sculpted, relentlessly sober performance, even in the andante, when conductor Andrew Davis seemed quite prepared to surrender to an *Elvira Madigan* reverie. By the end, you had to admire Goodyear's gifts, and also to wonder, perhaps, when and whether these may transform him into an interesting musician. As of Thursday, he's still playing like the very best student in the class, not like someone with important things to say about Mozart.

Teng Li became the TSO's principal violist two years ago at age 21, and was wowing the grownups for a long time before that. She has shown tremendous presence and musicality in her role within the orchestra, and did so on Thursday in a leading role in Berlioz's *Harold in Italy*. This oddly marvelous piece casts the viola soloist as a kind of observer in a set of orchestral scenes. Li made the most of her solo annotations and restatements of the theme. Her last muted entry at the end of the third movement was the single most beautiful thing in the concert, a small marvel of sensibility and understanding. Unfortunately, she was often crowded by the vigorous, colourful and none-too-careful reading of the score by the

orchestra and Davis. The TSO's conductor laureate, who gave an amusing verbal synopsis of the action before the piece began, let many details in the music go unattended, and offered no hint of the mystery and solemnity that haunt parts of this work.

The remaining work was Davis's own recent transcription for orchestra of Bach's *Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor*. There were many things to like about this act of homage, including the surprisingly modern pairing of detached piano and sustained cellos for the opening theme, followed by other piquant combinations of clarinet and harp, trumpet and xylophone, and woodwinds with marimba. Davis treated the brass and woodwinds as separate consorts, and found many ways of communicating heft without clogging the score. But the strings still sounded muddy during parts of the fugue.

Thursday's concert was broadcast live by CBC Radio's *In Performance*. Host Andrew Craig acted as emcee, keeping things reasonably smooth as the stage was reset for the concerto, and chatting amiably with Goodyear between his intermission baubles.

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