

Concert and Recording Reviews

"As a pianist, there's nothing, it seems, she can't do...What comes through are the vitality of her performance and jaw-dropping command of the keyboard...In these ten inspired, even breathtaking performances, Yang shows herself to be a fiercely committed new music advocate and confident navigator of unfamiliar realms, someone clearly oriented towards the future but also appreciative of what paved its way. "

- *Textura.org*

"Her dynamic range was breathtaking and her spinning out of the nocturne-like Andante was entrancing. Her playing of the solo cadenza was spectacular. "

– Williams Thomas Walker, *Classical Voice of North Carolina (CVNC)*

Performance of Glass etudes with Philip Glass, Timo Andres, my UNC student, Kenan Scholar Margaret Lynch and other renowned artists in the Glass at 80 Festival, Carolina Performing Arts.

"Yang, a UNC faculty member. . . gave an exciting, athletic performance of Nos. 11 and 12, finding the experimental rhythms in the counterpoint and accentuating the variants Glass reused from Etudes 1-10 for this. "

– Jackson Cooper, *Classical Voice of North Carolina (CVNC)*

Performance of Glass etudes:

"Clara Yang resumed the program with numbers 11 and 12, which struck me as very physical, with the music alternately wrestling and dancing and running wild with a sparkler and Yang keeping up without turning a hair. "

– Kate Dobbs Ariail, *The Five Points Star*

U.S. Premiere of Chen Yi's Piano Concerto *Four Spirits* with Long Yu conducting the China Philharmonic Orchestra:

"There are very few measures within *Four Spirits* that gives the piano soloist a moments rest, and a great deal calls for either extremes of dynamics or a wide palette of color. Yang was indefatigable in meeting every unconventional demand of Chen's frequently dense score. Her power was evident in the descending, thundering *fff* chords she tossed off before the strings took up a sweeping wave of sound suggestive of the first movement's dragon. . . Conductor Yu kept close co-ordination between Yang and the orchestra achieving miraculous balancing between them."

– Williams Thomas Walker, *Classical Voice of North Carolina (CVNC)*

"Clara Yang wore the same spectacular dress for the US premiere of Chen Yi's Four Spirits last night in UNC's Memorial Hall. A dress like that signals utter confidence; Yang's playing equalled the dress in bold certitude. Carolina Performing Arts had commissioned the concerto for piano and orchestra for Yang to play on this occasion with the China Philharmonic Orchestra, and the composer Chen Yi was in the audience. . . The piano alone takes the first bars—the entry of the Blue Dragon of the East—but from then on, the piano and orchestra bind tightly together. I thought the music was thrilling, rather in the way that a painted portrait can be thrilling when it feels true and insightful to the viewer."

– Kate Dobbs Ariail, *The Five Points Star*

"Yang proved a very sensitive and expressive pianist, well-suited to this role in a work that displays a wide range of emotions. . . The result was a real gem, and showed Yang's considerable skill and mastery of the instrument. . . [She] is a favorite of area music lovers."

– Bill Robinson, *Classical Voice of North Carolina (CVNC)*

"Yang's program 'explores the connection between the past and the present,' particularly the ways that contemporary American composers Muczynski, Andres, and Young engage past musical eras. Interspersing these works with works by Chopin and Schumann emphasize the ways the past—or more specifically romanticism—continues to resonate in the present. Yang's technique and range is impressive here, and she proves herself adept at the music of the present and the past. And as should be expected from a recording that takes time as its theme, she also demonstrates incredible rhythmic accuracy . . . Excellent program, gorgeous sound."

– Sang Woo Kang, *American Record Guide*

"Yang's style is extraordinarily lively, awake, and aware of the music's inner connections, the use of 'turnaround' phrases and the like. With further study, and applying herself, I think she could herself be a fine jazz pianist as well as a classical one—she certainly has both the technique and the élan necessary for this. Like so many young pianists, she has a flawless technique, but she possesses qualities that many of the others don't, particularly her way of incorporating the most difficult technical passages into the ongoing musical discourse and a long view of the music in terms of structure. She also has a gorgeous piano tone... From here, Yang jumps backwards to Chopin's Ballade No. 4. In her hands, however, it sounds somewhat strange and a bit new. She has the rare gift of being able to take an old warhorse and make it sound fresh... A first-rate recital by a first-rate pianist who knows her stuff and isn't afraid of challenges."

– Lynn René Bayley, *Fanfare*

"This lovely recital by Chinese-American pianist Clara Yang speaks to the core of what a musical heart means by romance. It might easily have been all-Chopin or all-Schumann, and we would surely come away beguiled by Yang's light, fluid take on 1840s sparkle and sentiment. But how much better to 'fold time' in upon itself and mix in from our own day pieces which speak to the same ardor, ebullience, and nostalgia. The emotional origami of love and loss works in any century, after all...Among the newer works, a real find is Robert Muczynski's Maverick Pieces...These are short, gleaming, clever, and sonorous pieces, delivered effortlessly and beautifully. I can't stop playing them!"

– Steven Kruger, *New York Arts* [Full Article](#)

"Ms. Yang brought out the subtle variation of color. and the shifts in rhythmic patterns were performed with clarity and the kind of supple freedom that even the most refined orchestral conductor could hardly match...She combined impressive keyboard prowess with probing emotional depth and daring individuality through to the thunderous conclusion. Ms. Yang thoughtfully attended to unraveling Schubert's musical intent, while giving the score a vividly personalized interpretation. "

– Joe Sekon, *Peninsula Reviews*

"The pianist for the Rachmaninoff was Chinese-born Clara Yang, now a highly acclaimed UNC music faculty member and recitalist, seemingly too young for the weight of her accomplishments, but extremely effective in the piece. I admired her two years ago, when she performed Beethoven's Choral Fantasy with Vladimir Ashkenazy and his European Union Youth Orchestra...Clara Yang's technique was effortless and smooth, and her rendition of the famous 18th Variation romantically memorable. It was wildly and deservedly well received by the audience. "

– Steven Kruger, *New York Arts*

"Yang's technical skill and artistic sensibility were apparent throughout this performance. At times her fingers moved as fast as seemed humanly possible. Her powerful expression of the Dies Irae plainchant quoted in variation 7 was spine-chilling while the orchestra accompanied with a slower version of the opening motif of the Paganini theme. The mystical quality of variation 17 was enhanced by Yang's delicate and sensitive touch. The glorious sweeping melody of the 18th variation, had it been an aria in an opera, would have been a show-stopper. Both orchestra and soloist put their all into this extravagant moment which is a peak of romanticism. The closing variations were a blazing and brilliant comet for both orchestra and soloist."

– Ken Hoover, *Classical Voice of North Carolina*

The Chinese-American pianist Clara Yang finished her European concert tour in Cervera. She offered us a program which included pieces from American composers and romantic works.

The Maverick Pieces op. 37 by Robert Muczynski are a group of twelve short pieces composed in 1977, which have a contrasting character. Based on a true classical tradition and a true romantic sense, the composer presents an unpretentious work that the pianist transmitted beautifully, with transparent textures and living emotions. There are many things to emphasise, such as the imagination and the simplicity of the third piece, the strong rhythmic impulse of the fifth one and the expression of the sixth one.

We discovered the young American composer Timo Andres with How can I live in your world of ideas? Based on the idea of a Philip Glass and the bright sounds of John Adams , the author seduced us with a melancholic work which include breaking elements . The pianist managed to find a complete atmosphere and stimulated the imagination and creativity to suggest moments of a great beauty with an enormous range of sounds. We savoured the same on Chopin's Ballad op. 52 in which Yang managed to find the balance between melancholy, tenderness and romantic agitation.

A sensitive phrasing and a great sound range helped finding a mystery, always presenting an appreciable subtlety lyricism. Reflection on a Tang Poem, composed by Phil Young, which was dedicated to the pianist, reminded us of his writing and the typical characteristics of Chinese music: modes of the pentatonic scale. Clara Yang ended the concert with an interpretation imbued with introspection, strength, power and delicacy of Schumann's Humoreske, whose name is the opposite from the personality of the composer. A precise articulation served by a thoughtful and musical vision captured the poetry, the abrupt mood changes, and the energy and passion that flew from the Schumann's staves.

– Santi Riu, *Segarra News* (Catalonia, Spain)

"Zheng and Yang play (Grieg Cello Sonata) with great intensity and romantic overtones. By comparison, the 2002 rendition by cellist Truls Mørk and pianist Håvard Gimse on Erato is far too restrained and refined... Zheng and Yang have a new recording that demonstrates their virtuosity and depth of interpretation in excellent sound. I recommend it to chamber music buffs everywhere. "

– Maria Nockin, *Fanfare*

" She revealed breath-taking technical prowess and keen interpretive insights. Here and elsewhere in the program there was a sense of the long line in which her overall focus helped keep the score's numerous small components in precise balance with one another and perfectly meshed in the Chaconne's quite overwhelming musical flow."

– John W. Lambert, *Classical Voice of North Carolina (CVNC)*

" Several days later, three scholars also represented the University of North Carolina with lectures at the Conservatory College. Pianist Clara Yang gave an overview of American approaches to the piano, with a lecture-recital of works by Barber, Gershwin, Liebermann, and others. Composer Lee Weisert discussed the formal innovations underlying his own music. And I myself presented several of the Rite-inspired pieces that Carolina Performing Arts commissioned in its year-long "The Rite of Spring at 100" festival, including works by Colin Jacobsen, Vijay Iyer and Prashant Bhargava, and Dmitri Yanov-Yanovsky."

– William Robin, *Huffington Post (CVNC)*

"Professor Clara Yang presented a highly successful lecture-recital at our Conservatory. Our Students and faculty were very impressed with her excellent technique and interpretations of the music of American composers George Gershwin, Robert Muczynski, and Samuel Barber. Her playing of composer Lowell Liebermann's work showed a profound artistry. "

– Demidov, V.P., Director of the Musical College of the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory

" With no intermission, the concert-grand piano was wheeled onstage for Robert Schumann's iconic Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54. Written for Schumann's wife, the virtuoso pianist Clara Schumann, the concerto was played here by another Clara: Clara Yang, of the UNC Music Department. Ms. Yang is in full command of this score, bringing a myriad of tonal colors to her playing...the highest registers of the piano sang brightly. Llewellyn's sensitive accompaniment of the slow movement produced memorable beauty in the dialogues between piano and cellos, and between piano and solo winds. Simply put, this was a fine performance of a well-beloved work by pianist and orchestra in perfect collaboration."

– Geoffrey Simon, *Classical Voice of North Carolina (CVNC)*

" 'Érard,' a solo piano meditation deftly performed by Clara Yang, is delicate and deliberately mechanical..."

– Peter Margasak, *Chicago Reader*

"Lee Weisert's stunning *Érard* (2012) was performed by Clara Yang. Weisert calls his work 'rigidly mechanistic,' but in the hands of a virtuoso, it becomes much more. "

– Karen E. Moorman, *Classical Voice of North Carolina (CVNC)*

" Beethoven's Sonata in D for violin and piano, Op. 12, No. 1, second only to his "Kreutzer" Sonata, Op. 47, is among my favorites. It was composed in 1787 and was dedicated to Antonio Salieri. The opening Allegro con brio is by turns playful and stormy with no lack of verve. The

second movement is a gentle, flowing set of variations leading to an exuberant and rollicking Rondo. Both instruments are treated equally. Richard Luby's articulation and intonation were excellent. Clara Yang's "chops" were simply breathtaking throughout the concert. The fireworks between the two during the finale were spectacular. Yang, Luby, and Raimi conjured a performance of great intensity and deep commitment. The eerie opening was aptly haunting with very few slight blemishes in Raimi's solo as he spun out Shostakovich's extreme high, glassy harmonics. Luby soon joined with equally ghostly, muted strings quickly joined by Yang's hushed piano. Their second movement was a wild hoe-down, a brash foot stomper. The musicians brought out the full horror the composer meant his nightmarish Largo to convey, and this quality was present in spades violent musical imagery of the finale. "

– William Thomas Walker, *Classical Voice of North Carolina (CVNC)*

" Newest piano faculty member Clara Yang explored Liszt as both composer and as transcriber. Her choice of Liszt's transcription of the art song "Widmung" by Robert Schumann (1810-86) linked the program nicely with last year's Schumann bicentennial...Liszt's Waldesrauschen (Forest Murmurs), the first of two Concert Etudes, reveals the composer's ability to "paint" a scene in sound, anticipating Impressionism. In both these works, Yang displayed a broad palette of color as well a finely graduated dynamics. Her rippling treble evoked forest murmurs beautifully while the huge cascades of sound lashed the listener with the storm's fury. This was some pretty impressive piano playing!"

– William Thomas Walker, *Classical Voice of North Carolina (CVNC)*