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Di Wu, pianist

Pianist Di Wu (pronounced Dee-Ooh), born in Xiamen, China in September 1984, and winner of the Juilliard School's William Petschek Award, played a deeply affecting debut recital in the newly renovated Alice Tully Hall on May 5. She is on the cusp of a major career, having won prizes and honors all around the world and having been selected as one of Musical America's Rising Stars in 2008.

Wu made her professional debut at 14 with the Beijing Philharmonic, came to the US in 1999 to study at the Manhattan School of Music, did her undergraduate work with Gary Graffman at the Curtis Institute, earned her Masters at Juilliard with Yohevid Kaplinsky, and is currently a candidate for Juilliard's Artist Diploma with Robert McDonald and Joseph Kalichstein. Brahms's Concerto No. 1 and Rachmaninoff's No. 3 are already part of her repertoire; she has also performed an all-Ravel recital and at 24 has been a Gilmore Rising Star.

Today's music world is overflowing with brilliant even scary young virtuosos. What really moved me is that Wu is far more than a mere hotshot contest winner. She has fierce concentration and is intent on penetrating into the music's innermost spiritual core.

At Tully she began with a little Mazurka, Opus 6, from 17-year-old Clara Wieck's *Soiree Musicales*. She followed it *attaca* with the revised version of Robert Schumann's intimate *Davidbündlertänze*, where the first piece quotes Clara's juvenile effort. Wu's fresh, technically brilliant interpretation made the best possible justification for the composer's afterthoughts and even minimized the liabilities of its later repeats, which to me have often



sounded redundant and destructive of the earlier edition's engaging symmetry.

In two of Medtner's *Fairy Tales*, Opus 20, Wu gave the neglected Russian composer's miniatures a real boost. Arnold Schoenberg's Three Piano Pieces, Opus 11, which were contemporaneous with the Medtner (the two composers even died the same year), were persuasively and probingly played.

Wu's utterly splendid interpretation of Ravel's pianistically terrifying triptych, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, was one of the best I've ever encountered. 'Ondine' was suitably coquettish and lethal as the water nymph pearly forth with ravishing color, power, and awesome technical composure. For all her poetry, she could also be decimating. For example, at bar 88, marked "ff, rapid and brilliant", she gave a sudden outburst that none of the work's hall-of-fame interpreters have managed with such ferocity. And so it was also in 'The Gibbet' (the corpse swinging from the gallows) and 'Scarbo' with its unlikely mixture of playfulness, bone-chilling morbidity, and glistening repeated notes.

'There was one short encore, the penultimate 'Child Falling Asleep' from Schumann's *Scenes from Childhood*. One might have assumed that Wu would go from that vignette right into its inevitable aftermath, but her poetry had already spoken.

HARRIS GOLDSMITH