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[Profile/Review: Jeremy Ho gives homecoming recital of Bach, Scriabin and Prokofiev](#)

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Jeremy Ho walked out calmly to face an applauding audience Sunday afternoon at Ambrose University College to play an encore to his thrilling, successfully-completed recital, the famous Liszt D-flat major Consolation. He had just finished an impressive performance, in mature-beyond-his years fashion, of Prokofiev's seventh sonata (see concert review below) a perfect contrasting follow-up to the étude-like sonata's thunderous big finish. Here, the appreciative crowd was awash in the young man's artistic maturity, self-possession and confidence.

The Liszt encore was played beautifully, of course, and a solid testament to how far he has come, earning him a well-deserved standing ovation.

Last year, Mr. Ho was admitted to McGill at the age of 15 to study with well-known professor of piano and accomplished teacher Kyoko Hashimoto at McGill University.

Prior to that, his preparation for university life and the rigours of adult music education were in the trusted hands of Edwin Gndt, professor of piano at Ambrose University, and a long-time educator of considerable

reputation in Southern Alberta with a full teaching studio. He taught Jeremy from age seven to age 15, through eight good years that Mr. Gndt won't soon forget.

“He had an ability at an early age. His fingers were so dextrous he learned the ‘thirds’ étude of Chopin quite young. He could do it with ease.”

But that comprises just one type of technique. What about the interpretive skills? Does he have the growth potential and ability to show broad range in his interpretive powers?

“His musicianship is always maturing and he will continue to mature. Anyone at this age needs interpretive guidance. His (interpretive) powers take shape if you offer him a challenge and if he's particularly excited about something.”

And Mr. Ho likes a challenge. He has taken on many seriously difficult pieces and with considerable artistic success as demonstrated throughout several Calgary recitals. He kept asking Mr. Gndt to teach him Tchaikovsky's first piano concerto, beginning, improbably at the age of 10. Mr. Gndt quite understandably said ‘no’.

“I'm from the old school. You have to grow into a piece like that,” he explained. “But what Jeremy's got going for him is that he can play anything. When the time is right, Jeremy will have the power to play that piece.” Of course, that still didn't stop Mr. Ho from asking his teacher for the Tchaikovsky on many occasions. Mr. Gndt deflected him, and this led, on occasion, to the development of another skill that seems to come naturally to the young pianist.

“He's got the compositional skills too,” Mr. Gndt continued. “When you hear five or six of his pieces they can sound like Doctoral candidate works.” Certainly, after hearing his composition ‘Arctic Mirage’ on Sunday afternoon, a suitable work to attest to his artistic maturity, he already knows how to combine interpretation with composition, a rare skill these days achieved by precious few teenaged and early twenty-something composers.

Jeremy's mind is equally keen, and he displays a quiet intelligence beyond his years that complements his artistic precocity. His father, Alan Ho, is professor of psychology at Ambrose University, with a deep background consisting of a considerable academic pedigree in visual neuropsychology. Jeremy's fascination with the mind and neuroscience and his breadth of academic interests play their way into his interpretations. For example, his ‘Arctic Mirage’ was based on a documentary about Northwest Passage exploration and the side effects sailors experienced from scurvy. At the end of the piece, one can hear the inevitable shipwreck – a fate shared by too many explorers in the Canadian Arctic's vast wilderness, a trait captured quite well in the composition's landscape (see concert review below).

So, did Mr. Gndt finally give the Tchaikovsky concerto to his brilliant student?

“At the very end (before he left for Montreal) I gave him the Tchaikovsky because I didn't want him to come back in ten years and say ‘you didn't give me the Tchaikovsky’! Well, the real reason is that he was finally ready for it, of course.” Mr. Gndt had observed that Mr. Ho had at last grown into facing the challenges of the work's endless possibilities.

Mr. Gndt is also impressed with his former student's ability to learn from any source. When asked what his lessons with Hong Kong Academy for the Performing Arts professor Gabriel Kwok were like, Mr. Ho replied

that they taught him different, if not equally important things about how to play, every bit as important as what he learned from Mr. Gndt and Ms. Hashimoto.

When I interviewed Jeremy, I found him to be a polite, highly intelligent and considered in his thoughts. But somehow, his music speaks best for him, and the review below shows his musical eloquence and perhaps describes his artistic and off-stage personality the best.

Opening with the Bach Prelude and Fugue in B flat minor from book one of the Well-Tempered Clavier, Mr. Ho produced a sensitivity of tone in the prelude with heartfelt consideration for every harmony and progression. Every exposed interval and rich chord was carried off with a dextrous maturity that one does not often hear nor can be found on recordings by some of the more popular Canadian or international pianists of our time. With a sensitivity to phrasing bordering on mastery, it is clear that these works will grow with him as he continues to evolve as a performer. But, what a fine opening statement to make for such a young pianist, accounting so rigorously for each note. His interpretation of the five-voice fugue (one of only two in the entire '48') showed a bravery for swimming in somewhat dangerous contrapuntal waters, but again with an ease of dexterity complemented with the appropriate light-touch in the pedalling to help elide important locally-phrased moments. It was a moving performance on piano, an able transcription from the organ (the likely originally-intended instrument) with due nuance for colourations in the many glorious suspensions found in this piece. It was an auspiciously successful, and indeed, outstanding opening to the afternoon's recital.

The less-frequently heard Sonata no. 15 in F major by Mozart followed. Without a doubt, there was mastery of the technical problems here, but there was little adventurousness in exploiting Mozart's diversity of topical discourse and emotive élan. Mr. Ho's interpretation was certainly never lacking in warmth of tone throughout and moreover, he managed the formal difficulties of Mozart's sophisticated third movement well. Although there were dubious moments where the piano did little favours for Mr. Ho this afternoon (not his fault but a problem with living in our driest of climates here in Calgary), he played the work with elegance and dextrous refinement. With luck, Mr. Ho will return to this work in the years to come and make it grow once again with fresh perspective.

Two of the later Scriabin études rounded out the first half of the afternoon's recital. Mr. Ho played numbers 4 and 5 from the set of eight, opus 42, and impressively well. He knows his Scriabin and ought to play more of this repertoire. He captured the dreamy Andante well with shades of Richter in his playing, without overdoing it as other pianists tend to do, nor yielding to the temptation of concocting an overly Impressionist interpretation. Balance was difficult to achieve on this piano, but Mr. Ho wrestled with the keyboard quite well and offered an astute reading of the work. The fifth étude was a little cautious in its opening, but quickly took the room by storm. This will become a fine piece for his mature years, while he searches for a little more aggression and contrast in the phrasing. Otherwise, here was a splendid and mature display of interpretive range from the combined demands of both these difficult works.

In the second half Mr. Ho performed one of his own compositions titled 'Arctic Mirage'. I had heard one of his compositions earlier last year, and Mr. Ho fits the bill perfectly as the performer/composer, certainly a nearly-lost tradition in Western Classical music. Of largely harmonic parallelist convictions and Nordic impressionist quality, the work is a beauty, borne out of the improvisatory world of Torjussen and motoric elements of Prokofiev. It is impressive, and is a potential window on a world of talented and original composition to come. I hope young Mr. Ho never stops writing for the piano.

Appropriately, the Chopin opus 10 études nos. 1, 3 and 4 followed and did not disappoint. They are

compulsory works – staples of the young recitalist's repertoire. The first étude takes a page out of the flash and brilliance of a young Louis Lortie, if perhaps a little too much in the A section but the expression and technical chops were all there in the B section, thus avoiding the temptation to give in to mechanized playing in this notoriously difficult knuckle-breaker. However, the third étude was a little lacking in subtlety, as though read as an emulation of proficient execution, concerned with the mastery of all its difficult lyricism and contrasting passage-work, particularly in the B section, while taking little time to stop and smell the roses in the fragrantly lovely A section. In spite of several small technical and narrative issues in the fourth étude it was certainly impressive to hear all this from the hands of a sixteen-year old interpreter, albeit with farther down the road to travel to artistic maturity, yet with considerable developmental interpretive power already at his precocious fingertips.

The recital concluded with a robust accounting of Prokofiev's Sonata No. 7 Op. 83, a daring programming choice and a difficult work requiring considerable bravura and artistic fortitude. Mr. Ho impressed the most here this afternoon, with a sterling accounting of everything from modal to motor elements, frequently striking impressive tonal and contrapuntal balance between disparate motives in both hands. I enjoyed his performance of the Prokofiev the most, particularly its level of maturity resting easily on a par with the recital's opening Bach offering. Mr. Ho was at his best when dealing with the contrasts of thematic ideas, an important feature that he zeroed in on with professional accuracy and considerable acme. Never allowing the tempo or the mood to lag, the diverse sections of the opening *Allegro inquieto* were always counterbalanced with a suffused pathos in the slow sections that were mature beyond his years. And the other two movements were as impressive if not moreso in places, particularly the B section of the *Andante caloroso* and the stunning conclusion to the final movement's étude-like *Precipitato*, bringing the difficult work to a well-rounded and powerful close.

But the becalming Liszt Consolation encore showed Mr. Ho's professionalism and stage personality best. When I met with Mr. Gndt after the recital, we agreed that Jeremy Ho chose the right piece to communicate his feelings to the room, and bring the frenetic mood of the Prokofiev back down to a quiet composed level, respecting his audience. "That showed a lot of class," Mr Gndt said, smiling.

Photo credit: with thanks to Alan Ho.

