

Pianist beguiles with serious style

By Kenneth DeLong

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The fundamental notions underlying most modern piano recitals stem largely from traditions and habits of mind established by Franz Liszt, notions that include the relationship between artist and audience, the choice of repertoire and even the practice of playing encores. Behind these notions lies the central idea of the pianist as showman, one who practices musical magic before an audience eager and willing to be wowed.

But there is another recital tradition, one stemming, perhaps from Chopin, in which empty display and theatrical grandstanding are eschewed in favor of a more serious approach to music, one in which the focus is the music itself and not on the manner of its presentation.

The recital presented Friday night by Jane Coop was of this second type, a recital which concluded the Gladys Egbert Memorial Festival.

Technically well equipped and utterly fluent in her pianism, Coop nevertheless did not present herself as a keyboard titan. Rather she beguiled her audience with a style of playing that contained many of the virtues frequently associated with pianists of the French school: clarity of line, poise, finesse, polish and a high degree of sensitivity both to the piano sound itself and to the delicate shaping of musical phrases.

comfortable with everything she played, Coop seemed on this occasion most completely at home with the Scarlatti and Haydn sonatas that opened the program. Favoring brisk tempos in the outer fast movements and spacious, relaxed middle movements, Coop brought to life the civilized wit and controlled emotion that lies behind these quintessentially 18th-century works.

The Haydn *Sonata in E minor*, the bane of generations of conservatory students, was here given an exemplary performance that was fluent, subtle and refined, and not without a dash of whimsy.

The second half included Ravel's *Valses noble et sentimentales* as well as three popular works of Chopin — the *Etude in E minor*, the *Nocturne in D-flat* and the *Polonaise-Fantasia* — all of which were performed with supple grace and sensitivity, wanting only a final measure of strength in the *Polonaise*.

Chopin's late *Mazurka in A minor* provided a fitting and exquisitely rendered encore.

It remains only to express a word of thanks to Gloria Saarienen, who organized the festival, for her efforts at keeping alive the memory of one of Calgary's greatest teachers, reminding Calgarians of the treasure trove of talent that was brought to musical maturity in their midst.

(DeLong is a freelance reviewer and a professor of music at the University of Calgary.)

Musically and technically