

Prize-winning pianist dresses the part at Al-Bustan

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BEIT MERI: "The performer is the voice of the composer," explained pianist Min-Jung Kym. "Stylistically, you are there to serve the music and interpret your performance according to the piece."

One of the UK's leading classical concert pianists, Kym made her Lebanon debut at Al-Bustan Hotel's Emile Bustani Auditorium Friday evening, at an invitations-only concert, sponsored by the British Embassy in Lebanon and bankrolled by one of the local banks.

The concert saw Kym progress gracefully through a program of Schumann, Beethoven, and Schubert before ending on a high note with two fiery pieces by Debussy.

As the municipal election fireworks flared to illuminate the Beirut skyline far below, Kym launched into "Papillons," Schuman's staccato piece directly influenced by "Flegeljahre," (loosely, "The Years of Indiscretion") an early-19th-century novel by Paul Richter.

The piece depicts the escapades of twin brothers Walt and Vult as they make their way through a masked ball in search of the same woman. Consisting of a dozen little pieces – most of less than a minute long, which collide to form a chaotic but carefully calculated composition – "Papillons" was a perfect way for the Korean-born, British-raised, pianist to showcase her renowned adaptive flair.

"I wasn't familiar with the Lebanese audience, so my program selection was chosen to include a little bit for everyone and introduce an array of different styles," Kym said after the show. "The Debussy piece, in particular, is a real fire cracker and a mixture of trying to introduce a genre of music that may be unfamiliar."

An associate of the Royal Academy of Music, Kym is currently collaborating with Zsolt-Tihamer Visontay, the concert master of the Philharmonia Orchestra. Since Kym's solo debut at Royal Festival Hall at the age of 12, she has won numerous prizes including the British Young Pianist of the Year Award.

Her finale at Al-Bustan, taken from Debussy's "Preludes for the Piano," represented the revolutionary 20th-century composer at his most avant-garde. Ruminating upon his obsession with indefinite and esoteric music, the piece was aptly composed to the background of July 14 and France's Bastille Day with fireworks, wonder and celebration hot in the air.

The historical tone of compositions is something Kym tries to recapture in performance.

"Knowing the history of a piece and the background of the work is important to me," she said. "It gives you a better perspective as to why a composer may have chosen a certain harmonic structure, or what they were trying to convey in their music, whether it is a stylistic experiment, or choice, or an expression of something which was occupying their personal life."

While in Lebanon, Kym will conduct master classes with some of the country's rising young stars. On Monday she will work with selected students from the Lebanese Conservatoire on how to perfect their performance styles.

Kym also believes in bringing a suitable visual angle to her performances, insisting the two go "hand in hand." Her gown, designed by Lebanese fashion designer Zuhair Murad for the event, complimented her grand performance style and the two have made plans to collaborate in the future.

Read more: (The Daily Star :: Lebanon News :: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb>)