

Concert review for Community Concerts
Thursday, Feb 23rd
from Sandra Wilmot

It has likely been many years since the Yamaha grand piano at the Kelowna Community Theatre was given a workout like the one it received last Thursday night at the hands of the extraordinarily gifted young pianist, Jan Lisiecki. Despite his youthful years, the 16 year-old Lisiecki delivered a program the envy of most seasoned concert artists.

The concert opened with the dark and ominous 'Prelude and Fugue no.14 in f -sharp minor' BWV 883 by J.S. Bach, which he presented with tasteful restraint. The 'Sonata No. 24 in F-sharp major' op. 78 by Beethoven followed, and while it is one of the shorter and lighter in character of Beethoven's 38 piano sonatas, it is certainly not lacking in depth or beauty, both of which Lisiecki brought out stunningly.

Next Lisiecki launched into three of Liszt's 'Concert Etudes' S.144, arguably some of the most formidably difficult pieces in the piano repertoire. In these works Lisiecki proved himself not only to possess a veritable technical ability on the piano, but a level of musicianship well beyond his years, as clearly demonstrated in the subtleties brought out in the third etude 'Un sospiro'.

Mendelssohn's 'Variations Serieuses' in d minor op. 54 rounded out the first half and provided a beautiful counterpoint to the Bach that opened the program. As Lisiecki alluded to in his on-stage commentary, Mendelssohn was largely influenced by the works of J.S.Bach and responsible for a significant revival of his music in the 19th century. Lisiecki brought out the transparent baroque qualities of the piece, while infusing it with passion.

More Bach followed on the second half with the 'Prelude and Fugue no.12' in f minor BWV 857 with Lisiecki bringing particular clarity to the voicing in the fugue. The program closed with the entire set of 12 'Etudes' op.25, by the Polish virtuoso pianist/composer Frederic Chopin. These works are a tour-de-force for any pianist, running the full gamut of technical difficulties, and Lisiecki executed each one with control, precision, and passion. His focus and composure during the brief pauses between etudes showed his intense dedication to his craft, and held the audience captive. After an instant standing ovation from the capacity audience, Lisiecki offered Chopin's well loved 'Waltz' op.64 no.2 as an encore.

Kudos to Kelowna Community Concerts for providing a forum for this young pianist to hone his skills, and for the audience to be witness to this truly remarkable talent. Hopefully the musical establishment will allow Lisiecki the freedom to mature into the sincere performing artist he clearly deserves to become.

Sandra Wilmot is a Kelowna-based freelance musician, composer, educator, and violin instructor. She plays professionally with the Okanagan Symphony Orchestra and is on faculty at the Kelowna Community Music School. She has witnessed his intense dedication to his craft, and held the audience captive. After an instant standing ovation from the capacity audience, Lisiecki offered Chopin's well loved 'Waltz' op.64 no.2 as an encore.