



A. Staupé (© Courtesy of the Artist)

The Ineffable “Wow” Factor

Andrew Staupé, Alexandria Le (*) (piano)

New York, Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall

April 11, 2012

What a curious program this was, performed by two singular pianists, still in their 20's. The mainstream composers were represented by the rarest compositions. Three world premieres were given by artists less than 30 years old. And one pianist presented a piece that could technically be the most ferocious ever written. The two artists were chosen by Pro Musicis, that unique organization which offers more than awards to young musicians. Their winners have the duty (or, unquestionably, the pleasure) to give music in hospitals, prisons, Inner City schools and other places rarely reached. The pair last night, Andrew Staupé and Alexandria Le, are young enough to be continuing their advanced studies, but proficient enough that they are performing around the world. Mr. Staupé and Ms. Le shared this, their first New York concert, and gave sometimes startling indications of their talent.

The first half was Andrew Staupé, whose technical skills were not only impressive but compelled audience members to breathe, at his finish, an audible “Wow!”

He began with yet another Hibernian work by Felix Mendelssohn, a “Scottish Fantasy.” Yes, it was composed in Berlin, but the composer had enjoyed his perambulations around jaunts to Scotland, and the opening movements were faintly Scots in character. In the final movement, labeled “Presto”, Mr. Staupé gave the first of many examples of his overpowering technical prowess, this made the usual “presto” dynamics look positively *Molto adagio* in comparison with his dashing, error-free travels around the keyboard. Nor did he stop there. *Dark Blue Etude* by Christopher Walczak was an omnibus showpiece of nuances of jazz (one Gershwin etude was almost quoted in full at the climax) and with a few atonal measures thrown in. But the following *Delusion* by Karl Blench was obviously composed for Mr. Staupé's unique talents. It was to be played, said the composer, “as fast as comfortably possible.”

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That's like telling a serial killer to murder “as many as comfortably possible”, for Mr. Staupé treated the keyboard to a non-stop show. He did slow down for a very sensitive Debussy prelude, but that was only a second wind for the Villa-Lobos long but never ever ever lax Rudêpoema.

No translation for Heitor Villa-Lobos' longest piano piece is possible, but it implies savagery. And Mr. Staupé whipped through its challenges—literally!! An insanity of whiplashes, crazy chords, and rhythmic impulses that nobody except a demon could dream up.