

Please Welcome

We chat with Australia's most outstanding young artists about music, performance and the future.

Jocelyn Ho

For a classical musician, you have an unusual background: starting a medicine degree before shifting to mathematics and music. What drew you away from the stethoscope?

There were practical as well as ideological reasons. Music for me has always been a passion, and undertaking a medical degree precluded me from spending much quality time at the piano. And I realised in my first year that I didn't want to be a doctor! I always liked to be challenged intellectually in an abstract way, and I think mathematics was a more enjoyable choice. Music is, after all, one of the more abstract kinds of art – you need to be able to conceive of a snapshot in time in your head. I think maths gives me a sound basis for being able to conceive of certain aspects of music that complement the instinctive and more emotional part of music.

How important is the art-science balance in your life?

To me, that is a question of passion and logic, of emotion and reason, and they are equally important. The "artistic" and the "scientific" exist in everything – they are two sides of the coin that point to eternal values like beauty and truth. The expression in Beethoven's last sonata points to a transcendent truth that is felt to be almost ineffable. To me, this piece is one of the pinnacles of art. But then, Bach's first prelude in C in the *Well-Tempered Clavier* is so logically beautiful that you have to admire its design. You can say that a scientific proof is elegant, while a piece of art is constructed structurally cogently. Where is the line?

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PIANIST
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You've won many awards for your playing. Which has meant the most to you?

I really enjoyed being part of the Australian National Piano Award. The atmosphere, I feel, is the most close to what making music is all about. What's more, I did not feel any kind of mean competitiveness amongst the pianists; we were all friends and were out there to support each other. Also, winning the ANPA gave me the opportunity to record with Master Performers. It has been the most invaluable experience I've had as a musician, being able to work with Paul Carasco closely in all stages of production. I am extremely happy with my album *Luminous Sounds* and am very grateful to both ANPA and Master Performers for this opportunity.

How did you choose the works on the album?

I wanted my debut album to display a wide variety of pianism and artistic expression, as well as virtuosity. I feel it is crucial for an accomplished pianist to be able to play convincingly and have something interesting and individual to say about different genres of music. There are comical elements, such as the Haydn Sonata No 59, more serious tones as in the Mendelssohn *Variations Sérieuses*; the Chopin Nocturne in D flat major, Op 27, No 2 is melodic expression in its most beautiful form and the Prokofiev Sonata No 7 contains the terror of war and undertones of irony and sarcasm. Debussy is one of my expert areas, as I have written a comprehensive analysis of his piano music of 1913 in the light of late-Romantic performing practices as my Master's thesis. The Rzewski *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues* could be called my "signature piece" – it takes pianism to a whole new level. It extends the role of the pianist to become a political activist not only through its "message" but its physicality of extended technique. Jocelyn Ho's debut album *Luminous Sounds* is in record stores this month. www.jocelynh.com