

Hye-Jin Kim dazzles with off-the-beaten-track repertoire at Kravis

By Greg Stepanich

In taking her audience from darkness to light, violinist Hye-Jin Kim also traveled from the uncommon to the tried-and-true, leaving rarely heard Sibelius behind for a virtuoso warhorse encore.

Kim, South Korean-born and trained at Curtis and the New England Conservatory, and now a professor at East Carolina University, made her Florida debut Monday night in the Young Artists Series at the Kravis Center's Rinker Playhouse. Ably accompanied by pianist Amy Yang, **Kim showed herself to be a musician of excellent technique, deep musicianship and a gratifying taste for off-the-beaten-track repertoire.**

That included the three of the Five Pieces (Op. 81) Jean Sibelius wrote during World War I, when his Finnish homeland was in turmoil. All three — Mazurka, Rondino and Valse — are high-grade salon music, but much more attractive than the Kreisler bon-bons violinists normally trot out. **Kim played them winningly, and she clearly enjoyed them, digging into their winsome melodies and colorful textures with aplomb.**

Another rarity, Bedrich Smetana's Aus der Heimat, is a sonata-style late work (1880) with a strong Czech folk flavor carried out in a big Germanic way. Kim paced this piece very well, climbing steadily and surely in the last section to its last bravura statement, after a tender opening movement and a good feel for the heart-on-sleeve emotionalism of the slow movement. Smetana's piano writing here is huge, and Yang did a commendable job of keeping the balance, buttressing but never overwhelming Kim.

A much more progressive Czech work on the program, Leos Janacek's lone Sonata, offers a different kind of dramatic landscape, with fragments of melody and little violin shudders, much of it over burbling ostinatos. Kim understands this landscape, and in the second movement (ballade) she gave this haunting music a kind of desperate, lovely singing tone that worked well. I could have used a little more attention to the strangeness of the sonata overall, with its quirky outbursts and silences; here, the music was too polished to make Janacek's full effect.

It was the same kind of well-rounded, scrupulously considered, careful polish she brought to the opening piece on the program, Schubert's Sonatina No. 2 (in A minor, D. 385). This is music that suits Kim's style well, which was crystal clear and shapely throughout. This was the earliest music on the program (1816), and Kim and Yang played it with the intimacy its modest dimensions demand.

The program proper closed with the early Violin Sonata (in E-flat, Op. 18) of Richard Strauss, a piece with intimations of the gigantic tone poems (particularly Don Juan) the composer would soon write. It's a large, showy piece, and here Kim offered a much more intense, powerful side to her playing. Most of this was very effective and beautiful but some more license would have been welcome — such as in the main themes of the outer movements, which cry out for some emphatic leeway such as a slight stretching of the tempo — when they return.

For an encore before the Rinker's appreciative house, Kim unleashed Sarasate's Zigeunerweisen (Op. 20), and gave them the kind of fireworks they'd been waiting for. And they were good fireworks, too: pinpoint accuracy, impressively drilled runs and a generous dash of communicative dazzle.

