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Jade Simmons at the National Academy of Sciences

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Daniel Bernard Roumain's Hip-Hop Studies & Etudes for Solo Piano can't actually be played by a single pianist -- but Jade Simmons found a way.

Sunday afternoon at the National Academy of Sciences, Simmons brought together her musical tastes, ranging from romantic ballades to Timbaland, even when it seemed impossible. To perform Roumain's work, she used a loop pedal to record one line of the three-stave piece live and then played it with her foot.

The work is often performed by a nine-piece ensemble, so to beef it up she made electronic beats with friends, like her favored producer might do, so that the composer's short rhythmic riffs (his take on collections like Bach's "Well-Tempered Klavier") were surrounded by booms, rattles and spacey shimmers.

A clear, powerful pianist with a magnetic personality, Simmons charmed in George Gershwin's Three Preludes; one could easily imagine hips swiveling to her Charleston. More intriguing, though, were pieces by Afro-Cuban composer Tania León. "Momentum," alternately jumpy and lush, probed and melded blues, jazz, Latin music and 12-tone composition; and "Tumbao" resembled a dance spinning out of control, with octaves and single repeated notes again making rhythm the focus.

Although contemporary works proved to be Simmons's strength, the program also included works by Rachmaninoff and Chopin. Simmons also gave a taste of Barber's Sonata for Piano: Explaining that she felt under the weather, she performed the final two movements and snippets of the first two.

If this was Simmons when she was not at her best, she should be worth seeing any time.

-- Ronni J. Reich