



COURTESY OF KLARA MIN



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Pianist Klara Min on Having Faith in Music

CATHERINE YANG

NEW YORK—Concert pianist Klara Min has a dynamic spirit.

In a recent concert, she put together a program of music with alternating themes of lightness and darkness, ending with an Alexander Scriabin piece that brought the listener through an inferno, and finally an encore of a hymn that finished the symbolic musical journey and brought peace to the soul.

“I was playing for my grandmother, who was in the hospital, and when I played the hymn ‘Great Is Thy Faithfulness,’ and so many people cried—I cried! And I never cry on stage!” Min said. “I think they felt what I felt; that’s really something. I feel like nothing can replace that feeling, that connection with people.”

Min, who splits her time between Berlin and New York, is a musician who has performed on the most prestigious stages in the world, and an active mentor to young musicians trying to build a career. Her goals are to connect and to constantly move forward.

After musing on her career for a moment, she said, “I want to play more.”

Many young musicians blossom in their 20s and 30s, but then might not be heard from again. “It sounds strange, but I think I should play more,” and keep playing, Min said. “When I reach 70-something, I really want to play well on stage and make everyone cry. I think that’s what I’ve wanted to do since the beginning, since I was a child.”

Creating Connection

The path to becoming a pianist can be a difficult and lonely road.

Min grew up in a musical family, with a mother who is a composer and piano teacher. But Min was never expected to take up music; in fact, her mother wouldn’t teach her (she had too many students) and also warned her against it.

“She said: ‘It’s a really difficult path. You’re going to suffer a lot,’” Min said. But she was sure she

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Ars Longa, Vita Brevis

Klara Min’s favorite aphorism, “ars longa, vita brevis,” is a Latin translation from a work by the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates. It means “art is long, life is short.”

Klara Min believes that performing requires sincerity from the artist and faith in the music.



As part of the New York Concert Artists & Associates (NYCA), founder and artistic director Klara Min established the NYCA Symphony Orchestra.

wanted the piano for life.

“What I really love about the piano, is that no matter how many different pianists sit at the piano, it produces a different sound, just depending on the pianist,” Min said. “It has different layers. It’s an interesting and a complete instrument; I love it.”

As she entered the professional world of playing, she realized her mother was right: establishing a career can have little to do with music itself, and doing it on your own takes a toll.

Min didn’t see any clear path ahead of her. “It was complete chaos. But I was holding a candle of faith, thinking, ‘I can do it, I can do it,’ and something happened, and happened, and happened.” Until finally she realized, “Oh, I’m here.”

Having created a career for herself, Min wanted to inspire other young artists to believe they are capable of doing the same.

“Generation after generation, things should be better, and I want to help in the ways that I can help,” Min said. Some people are well-suited to becoming teachers. Others become inspiring figures just by doing what they do. Min felt she could make the best impact by helping young artists get their gigs.

“Pianists are so prone to working alone; you practice forever. ... In a way, [pianists] are self-absorbed, so it’s hard to even communicate among pianists,” she said.

So in 2008, Min created New York Concert Artists & Associates (NYCA), a society of musicians, based on composer Robert Schumann’s idea of the “Davidsbündler” (“alliance of David”). He intended his imagined society to be a spiritual fraternity of creative minds, and when Min discovered the idea, she fell in love with it.

NYCA’s purpose is to connect musicians with managers, presenters, and publicists, and to help artists better articulate their messages to the world.

In August 2018 at Merkin Concert Hall, NYCA will hold a two-week music festival that Min says will notably include networking sessions to bridge the art and business sides of the industry.

“There’s not only one way to make your career,” Min said. “They [young musicians] need to know what’s out there and what’s the reality, and I want them to have the chance to meet all these people.”

The advice she most often gives to young musicians is to not give up.

“Passion is not just a firework. It comes with persistence and longevity. So don’t give up if you have faith—in music, not in you, because music is greater than you,” Min said. “And if you lose yourself in music, you will find yourself.”

Music Is Greater Than You

Min says that as an artist, she wants to connect people by touching their souls through music.

“It sounds cliché, but that’s what it is,” she said. “That comes from my attitude toward music, how I perceive music, and how I’m going to produce that sound—through who I am. If I’m true and sincere to music and myself, I think it brings it out in the audience’s minds as well.”

In this way, it is also a search for the truth, Min explained. Music reflects the reality of life, she said, in greater form.

But because everyone perceives differently, what is a round shape to her may be an angular one to someone else.

“There are a lot of versions [of what you perceive], but at the core of all the versions, there is a truth, and that’s what I want to bring out,” Min said. “I think we’re blessed to be able to express that, through our body and our fingers, and with our mind.”

Music is able to evoke great profundity, sometimes subconsciously, but it is the music more than the musician, Min said. It requires sincerity in the artist, and faith in the music.



CHRIS LEE