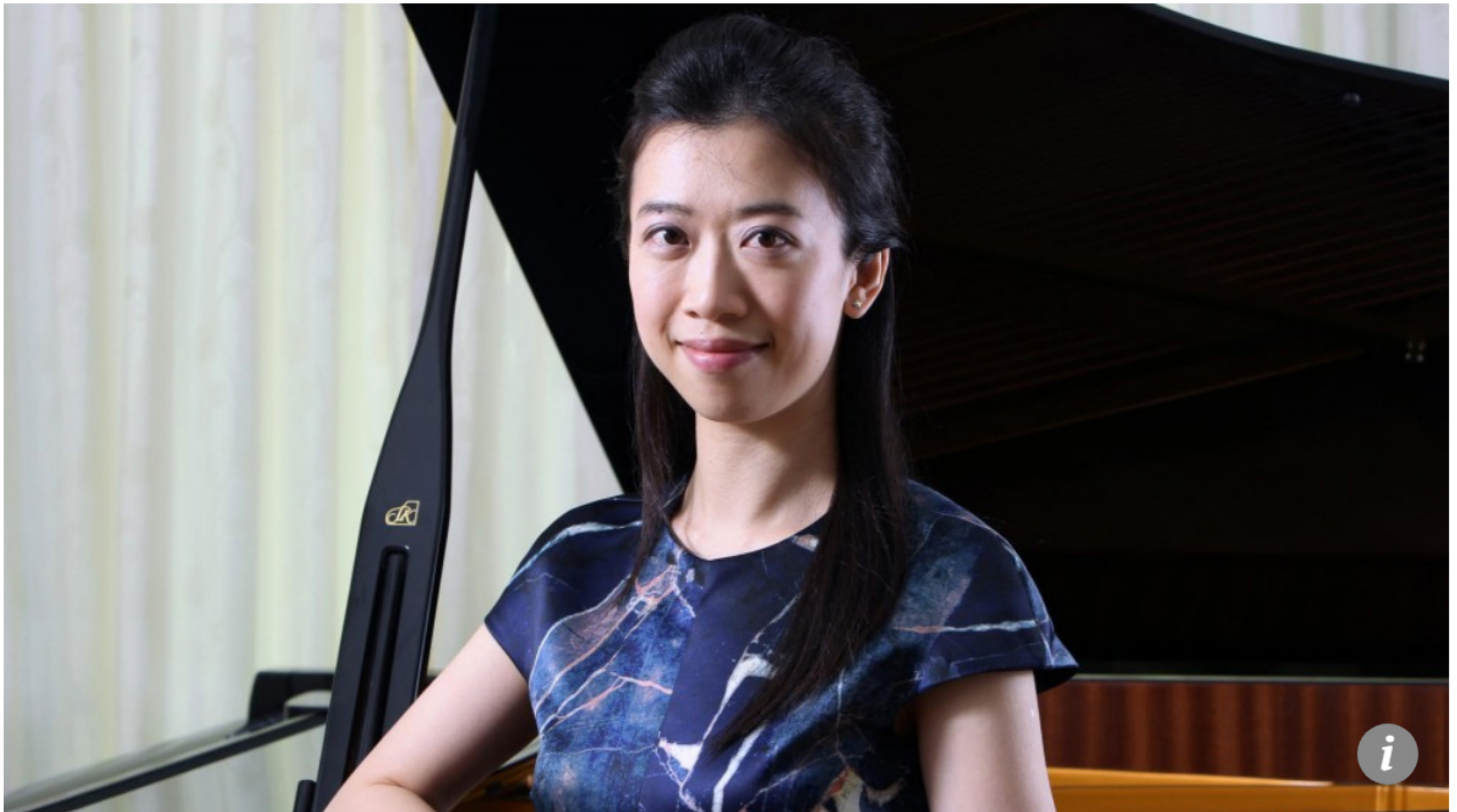




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# Hong Kong pianist Colleen Lee offers strength and lyricism in Russian repertoire

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Oliver Chou

**The Spirit of Russia: Piano Recital**  
**Colleen Lee Ka-ling**  
 Thursday  
 City Hall Concert Hall

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The city's sole International Chopin Piano Competition medallist has a muscular side to her musicianship that goes beyond the usual refined lyricism.

Colleen Lee Ka-ling - who in 2005 won 6th prize at the prestigious contest held in Poland every five years - performed her first all-Russian repertoire with power and resilience that belied her diminutive physique.

Sailing through challenging passages with clarity, she reflected overflowing confidence and discipline.

But her faithful reading of the scores deprived the performance of singularity, especially the strong Russian flavour that legendary masters had shown in recordings.

Lee began the ambitious programme with Tchaikovsky's *Seasons*, a 40-minute suite depicting various moods and scenes from January to December.

The lyrical opening sounded almost like a Chopin ballad, while folksy elements were strong in *Song of the Reapers* and *Troika*. But it was the famous *Barcarolle* for June that featured the melodic beauty at its best.

Next up were three short pieces from Rachmaninov's *Etudes-tableaux* Op 39 that, had they been the concert openers, could have saved late members of the audience from waiting to the end of *Seasons* to get to their seats. Or maybe the wait was a deliberate lesson designed by Lo King-man, who arranged Lee's show.

These three "study pictures" are technically daunting. For Lee as a lyrical pianist, the weak boom in the left hand was especially noticeable, but the build-up in those massive chords was convincing. Galloping fearlessly over the octaves, Lee delivered bravura-ending chords in the D major etude that got her all charged up for the grand work in the second half.

Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* is the ultimate showpiece for pianists. Played non-stop, it consists of 11 movements that include notoriously difficult scores.

Lee's opening of the Promenade was surprisingly strong, and it turned out to be her statement for the debut of the mega piece. Contrary to worries about her energy, she remained in top form in bringing out drama, such as the come-and-go of the Cattle Cart and finesse in the echoes in Catacombs. The big resonance the little lady created in the final chords was nicely balanced out by the serene *Reverie* by Igor Borodin as an encore.

*This article appeared in the South China Morning Post print edition as: Strength and lyricism in a Russian repertoire*