

## The prodigy returns

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By Lisnaree Vichitsorasatra

**At 15, Abigail Sin has lost none of the promise that 'Time' magazine saw in her as a youngster**

Five years after Time magazine tagged her as a child prodigy, Singaporean pianist Abigail Sin is easily living up to the billing on a world tour that brought her to the Thai-German Cultural Foundation auditorium in Bangkok last week.



She's still only 15, and though she draws wild applause at the end of every selection, she still has the same ambition - to get better.

It was a triumphant return to Bangkok for Sin. The last time she was here, Time's plaudit was still fresh in her ears. This time the music she chose was nothing if not difficult - intricate compositions by Bach, Beethoven, Liszt, Charles Tomlinson Griffes and Alberto Ginastera.

Her ability was nothing if not amazing.

Backstage, Sin admitted to feeling a little stressed during her show, but was soon laughing as she recalled her first encounter with the piano.

"I thought it was a toy!" she said of the instrument she discovered in her grandmother's house. It quickly stopped being a plaything, and she asked her parents to arrange lessons.

Juggling school and music coaching, she practised up to seven hours a day, then jettisoned her regular studies in favour of the National University of Singapore's Young Siewtoh Conservatory of Music.

"I skipped high school, so I missed the science and maths, but I don't regret it," says Sin, who performed her first recital at age nine at a piano festival in Manchester, England.

Maybe she didn't need the science lessons - she's got physics nailed, observing that her music is about "tension and release".

On her 13th birthday, in Denver, Colorado, she received a standing ovation, but her favourite concert experience thus far came only last year when she played in Ukraine and Lithuania, where the audiences cheered constantly.

"I did five recitals in six days, which was crazy."

Her ambition is to create within any given concert a "sound world, a whole new world where I can draw out the audience's emotions".

She loves the way singers can create vast range of sounds beyond a piano's given reach, and wants to imitate that, to make the piano sing.



The child prodigy said she'd rather be a dynamic artist who continues to grow in her ability.

Sin prefers a slow pace of playing to the fast and furious style that's made some pianists famous.

A gentle grace, she said, "is hypnotic - it makes everyone stop and listen".

"Pianists tend to play a beat faster than the orchestra," she pointed out, but they should be one beat slower.

Does she ever feel she's overreaching for the more complicated pieces?

"Just because I don't have a boyfriend," she said, "doesn't mean I can't play a romantic piece well."

When she plays Maurice Ravel's "Jeux d'Eau", Sin imagines light reflecting on the water.

The compositions of American composer John Corigliano helped her to see things that way and apply the visual aspects to her performance.

"His music is wild and sensual - it just explodes - so there's a hidden part of me that I can bring out."

**Lisnaree Vichitsorasatra**

**The Nation**

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### **Abigail Sin's hit parade**

Mozart: "His music is beautiful, elegant and refined."

Joshua Bell: "Haunting, beautiful, all these colours I never heard before." She picks "The Red Violin" as his best.

Dvorak

Elgar

Saint-Saens

Schumann

Haydn

Jacqueline Du Pre's "Cello Concerto"

"The Beethoven Piano Sonatas" by Daniel Barenboim