

WRITTEN IN THE PURE, CLEAR AIR OF NASHVILLE, INDIANA
(SEE ESCAPES, NY TIMES, 9/22/06): I'M BACK

Alan Rich (L.A. Weekly)

Caption: Pianist Gloria Cheng — Spheres without fears

SPHERE OF ACTION

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

The crowd at Zipper Hall last Tuesday night, for the first of this season's Piano Spheres concerts, was one of those spectacles that renew your confidence in the future of energetic, serious musical programming. These concerts have been going on now for 12 years, and the audience has steadily increased while the programs themselves have become more and more adventurous, including not only great works of the piano repertory but some interesting wanderings afield. Last week's big work had begun life as part of a string quartet; another was built around the reading of a sad and sexy poem. I heard nobody complain that there wasn't enough piano. That's because the pianist was Gloria Cheng, one of the series great founding spirits and a superb adventurer on her own.

The big work was the Great Fugue of Beethoven's Opus 130 String Quartet, bipolarity in music if anything ever was, in a keyboard transcription that Beethoven may or may not have had anything to do with. Robert Winter delivered some of his typical madcap program notes and joined Gloria in a two-piano reading of similar quality that had to put everything else on the program somewhat in the shade. Everything else included some rather harebrained Beethovenesque variations by Saint-Saens and the delightfully footloose Hallelujah Junction by John Adams (both also for two pianos, with the two splendid conductors Neal Stulberg and Grant Gershon on second), as well as some morose bits by Thomas Ades in anticipation of his full participation on the next Spheres program come December.

Two movements from Stephen Andrew Taylor's *Seven Memorials* made no stronger case for this composer than the complete performance had two years ago. Never mind; overall this was another cherishable concert, music for the thinking listener by the thinking musician. The season has begun.