

Pianist Tazaki shows brilliant technique with Beethoven

In her first visit to Vancouver and playing for the festival's noon-hour Beethoven-Plus series, Japanese-born pianist Etsko Tazaki chose a formidable piece of music, Beethoven's 50-minute *Diabelli Variations*, which she played, no less formidably, from memory.

An extremely fine musician, educated at the famous Toho music school in Japan as well as at Juilliard, she brought great variety and panache to the most significant and difficult series of variations written since Bach's *Goldbergs*. The *Diabelli Variations* came about in 1819 when the Austrian composer Anton Diabelli, planning to publish the results for a quick buck, invited 50 composers, including Schubert and Beethoven, to submit one variation each on an innocuous little waltz tune he'd written.

Insulted by the idea of writing just one, Beethoven wrote 33. Nobody remembers what the other 49 composers wrote for Beethoven's brilliant effort, which turned a trifle into a magnum opus.

Extreme independence of left and right hand through the densest thickets of notes characterized Tazaki's playing. She tossed off the most difficult passages, like the stormy double fugue that suddenly disappears into an ether of C-major. She played Beethoven's bumptious take-off on *Don Giovanni* with real boffo wit, and his lyrical variations



songfully.

Sporadically, the hour-long concert became a voice-and-piano recital for the sound of humming (here she was way out of tune).

The "plus" in the Beethoven-Plus program was *August Requiem*, written in memory of the dead in Hiroshima by Toshimeo Sato, a war-time survivor who was eating watermelon at the time of the blast. A short but haunting piece: over a constant rocking rhythm in the left hand, the right one builds up a matrix of increasingly dissonant agitation in increasingly difficult rhythms. Her encore was an infinitely less traumatic *Traumerei* by Robert Schumann . . .