



# Yundi Li

## Yundi Li: From accordion player to concert pianist

### **Born**

1982 in Chongqing, China

### **Started musical studies**

At the age of four, on accordion, not piano

### **Hobbies**

*"Driving, going to art museums, dining, wine, and photography."*

*In 2000, a panel of 23 judges in Warsaw declared Yundi Li the First Prize winner of the International Chopin Competition, the first musician in 15 years, and the youngest ever, to be awarded the top prize. He had just turned 18.*

*Since his stunning victory, Yundi Li has continued to thrill audiences with his vivid performances and style.*

*The Boston Globe has admired his "gorgeous tone" and "fluid and intensely musical" phrasing." His playing, they confirmed, "was a model of clarity, elegance, and unaffected grace."*

*The interview with Yundi Li was conducted prior to his debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in the Ravel Piano Concerto in G Major in November 2007. Portions of the original interview were published by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.*  
—Paula Tsurutani

So far, 25 year old Chinese piano sensation Yundi Li has been seen in a Nike TV commercial promoting the Olympics and at Carnegie Hall, but hasn't been seen in Chicago performing. That changes later this month when Li makes his long-awaited debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra playing Ravel's Piano Concerto in G Major, a dazzling and jazz-inspired work. The pianist, who made international headlines at the age of 18 as the youngest winner of the prestigious Chopin International Piano Competition, talks about the start of his keyboard education (notably, not on piano), some important mentors, and new recording plans.

*My parents aren't professional musicians, but they love music, especially my mother, who was a ballet dancer when she was very young. One day, my mother took me to a department store where I was attracted by a small accordion at the counter. I fell in love with its special sounds when the sales clerk demonstrated a short piece to me.*

*From that point on, I played the accordion every day like a toy. Then, I had an accordion lesson with a teacher who was quite amazed by the pace of my learning. After one year of accordion studies, I won some competitions. Then, I discovered the piano! The piano interested me quite a bit. I loved its sound and tone, especially because its volume was so much greater than the accordion. Finally, at the age of seven, I asked my parents to find me a piano teacher, and now, the piano is still my love.*

### **Two very important musical mentors and friends**

*Maestro James Levine and Maestro Seiji Ozawa are two of my important musical mentors as well as my good friends. Both of them have given me so much advice about my musical career. They are much older, and more experienced, but have very young hearts. They are so friendly and eager to share their personal ideas and opinions with me. Of course, they are very fine conductors as well as pianists and can really inspire my playing. Sometimes, we will hang out at dinner after concerts, and chat with each other like friends, so I am blessed to know them and work with them at my very young age.*

### **Watch for this recording**

*I think I am the type of person who is not easily satisfied; I am always looking for a better result or bigger achievement. Next spring, I'll have a new recording coming out in the U.S. It's a recording I made with the Berlin Philharmonic and Maestro Seiji Ozawa in Berlin this summer. I played the Prokofiev Piano Concerto No. 2 in the concert and it was recorded live. As far as I know, it was the first time in 40 years the Berlin Philharmonic has played this piece. It was a very impressive experience for me, and I can't wait to see this recording come out in the U.S. soon!!*