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Spotlight on guest artists at the Phil

It is no mean feat for a young conductor to have achieved so much by the age of 29 — especially for a woman in a field dominated by male colleagues.

Friday evening at the Philharmonic Center for the Arts, music lovers were quick to celebrate the talent of Ya-Hui Wang, the charming and articulate guest conductor who led the Naples Philharmonic Orchestra through works by Mahler, Mozart and Mendelssohn.

Remarkably self-possessed, Wang, who was recently appointed assistant conductor of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, not only revealed a strong baton technique, but she radiated the kind of poise and interpretive know-how that quickly drew responsive playing from the orchestra.

It is no wonder that she has been given the opportunity to gain experience as the apprentice conductor with the Chicago Symphony under the guidance of Daniel Barenboim, her mentor. Wang has also conducted the New York Philharmonic and the Baltimore Symphony, and frequently returns to the city of her birth to conduct the Singapore Symphony.

Friday's program opened with Wang's informal commentary about the second movement of Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 1 (The Titan), which was played by the orchestra earlier this season. The tender "Blumine" movement, also called the "Flora," was dropped by Mahler as not being sufficiently symphonic in content. The orchestra did well by the recently rediscovered work, which flows with melodic invention and shimmering textures.

The concert also featured the Australian-born pianist Eva Markus, who is the same age as Wang. The international prizewinner grew up in Switzerland, but most of her advanced studies and concert appearances have come in the United States.

Markus' sensitive, rather muted interpretation of Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 20 in D Minor revealed sound musicianship and a lyrical warmth that was acknowledged by the audience's enthusiastic response. Although the work's opening throbbing themes needed a bit more spark or drama, Markus emerged as an intuitively musical pianist with a firm grasp of the concerto's subtleties.

The program ended with the rapturous melodies of Mendelssohn's Third Symphony — called "The Scotch" symphony, because Mendelssohn was so inspired by a visit to Edinburgh in 1829 that he wrote Queen Victoria for permission to dedicate the work to her. He became the toast of London and made nine more visits to the British Isles.

Conducting the work from memory, Wang was fully in command of this moody and highly evocative piece with its bagpipe-like clarinet theme sounding out over a droning bass. Although to most listeners the music conjures up warring clans and Highland mist, to the composer Robert Schumann — a friend of Mendelssohn — the music evoked scenes of Italy, not Scotland.

Whatever the aural pictures suggested on Friday, the orchestra responded to Wang's baton with some beautiful playing, indeed.