

Texas Public Radio

# Charles Yang Breaks Boundaries In Recital

By [Nathan Cone](#) • Nov 30, 2015

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Charles Yang (left) and Peter Dugan (right) take a bow.

8:05

Full interview with Charles Yang and Peter Dugan.

One piano and four strings can yield a world of sound, according to violinist [Charles Yang](#). With his musical partner Peter Dugan, Yang's November 10 show for ARTS San Antonio exceeded expectations of what a violin recital can be, incorporating Ravel, gypsy melodies, virtuoso improvisations, and exciting arrangements of classic and contemporary pop and rock songs that sounded almost as if they were meant to be for violin and piano.

“[The program is] something that we have been developing over the past several years,” explained pianist Dugan. “We can read each other’s minds now,” Yang said with a smile.

The two musical collaborators met eight years ago, and have been playing as a duo for the past five years. Yang grew up in a strictly classical household, but was nevertheless influenced by

his home base of Austin, Texas and its diverse music scene. Dugan has been a musical omnivore his whole life. Even while training formally at Juilliard, the two began stretching their performance boundaries, looking for new music to arrange in a “classical” manner.

“When I first heard ‘Womanizer,’ that Britney Spears song, it was my second year at Juilliard,” Dugan remembered. “There was this flat 2 chord. Classical musicians would call it a [Neapolitan chord](#). I remember thinking that’s pretty hip for a Britney song. I started changing and altering it, and it was Charles that encouraged me.”

In concert, Dugan played “Womanizer” as a solo fantasy for piano that delighted the audience, regardless of whether they knew the sexed-up original tune.

Yang followed the performance with Queen’s “Bohemian Rhapsody” for solo violin. His arrangement is all the more impressive when you remember the original song required so many overdubs that legend has it you could practically see through the reel-to-reel tape Queen recorded on, it had been run through the player so many times.

What makes a song a good candidate for the Yang/Dugan treatment? The song has to be “something that fits us, and can tell a story,” according to Yang. “A lot of songs can be very repetitive without the lyrics. But if you can make something without lyrics, that ... makes people understand the piece itself, that’s when we think a song works. If we don’t need to sing one word and we just play the melody and [the audience] understands it, that’s our goal.”

Yang and Dugan had a breezy rapport on stage with each other and the audience, and clearly enjoyed their time in San Antonio. They’ll be releasing an album soon. In the meantime, you can hear the entire performance this Saturday night, December 5, at 7:00 on *Performance Saturday* on KPAC 88.3 FM and KTXI 90.1 FM.