

ChamberFest Concert 6: “Snap! Crackle! Pluck!” at the Wine Spot

By Daniel Hautzinger



A back-lit beer cooler casting its light on rows of folding chairs. Vivacious artwork hanging from the walls. Popcorn tumbling from bag to hand to mouth. The murmur of conversations smoothed by wine. Plus the fine musicians of ChamberFest, having a ball.

On June 25, at the midpoint of its ten-concert run, ChamberFest Cleveland relaxed into the Cleveland Heights art gallery-cum-wine and beer store The Wine Spot for some cheerful short works, wisely enhanced by amplification. For who wants to hear stodgy old Brahms in such a setting? (Though Brahms certainly loved his beer).

The addition of two unadvertised pieces and a shuffling of the order reflected the conspicuous lack of fuss. Bassist Nathan Farrington and cellist Robert deMaine were the perpetrators of the extra music.

Rossini's jocular *Duetto per Violoncello e Contrabasso* flashed with élan from both performers, Farrington's raised eyebrows and grin turning the work into an *opera buffa* while he blazed through scales on his unwieldy instrument. The two later returned with another unlisted song, this time with Farrington more than adequately strumming guitar and singing Don McLean's "Vincent," despite having only picked up the instrument about a year and a half ago.

Farrington featured in the announced program as well, joined by violinist David Bowlin for a movement from *Concerto Duo for Violin and Double Bass* by his former bass teacher, Edgar Meyer. Bowlin and Farrington switched off accompanying duties as each flew through Appalachian-style fiddling. One particularly striking effect was Farrington's tracing of Bowlin's theme high up on the bass, creating a rippling echo.

Befitting the unusual venue, the concert included a relatively unfamiliar instrument: the pipa, or Chinese lute. Before performing two songs, the endearing Gao Hong introduced her instrument and demonstrated some of its remarkable pictorial effects: imitations of bubbling water, firecrackers, cymbals, and chattering crowds. She then used all of these to conjure a boat race, before playing her own composition, “Flying Dragon.” The work was the most emotional of the night, depicting her wistfulness and agitation at leaving her family to become a musician at the age of twelve. “I hope you like it. If you don’t, I will try harder,” she said, laughing.

Violist Dimitri Murrath shredded like a guitarist in Kenji Bunch’s groovy *The 3 Gs for Solo Viola*, showcasing another instrument not often heard solo. The evening ended with David Bruce’s relentlessly upbeat “Dances” from *Gumboots*, lustily performed by Franklin Cohen, over-amplified on clarinet, Yehonatan Berick and Amy Schwartz Moretti, violins, Murrath, and Julie Albers, cello. Then the crowd refilled their glasses and resumed their chatting, buoyed by the light-hearted music they had just heard.

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