

Violinist Tessa Lark and pianist Andrew Armstrong shine at Finney Chapel (Nov. 19)

by Mike Telin



In October of this year, the brilliant young violinist Tessa Lark wowed audiences and critics with her commanding performances of John Corigliano's 'Red Violin' Concerto with CityMusic Cleveland. On Sunday, November 19 the Avery Fisher Career Grant winner returned to the area, this time showing her skill as a recitalist during a captivating program as part of the Oberlin Artist Recital series. She and the superb pianist Andrew Armstrong brought an

abundance of musical prowess to the Finney Chapel stage.

Lark, who has a genial stage presence, began with Stravinsky's six-movement *Suite Italienne*, transcriptions made by the composer from his ballet *Pulcinella*. Playing with a rich, pure tone and judicious use of vibrato, the violinist captured the many moods of the Introduzione. The Serenata was warm and soulful, while the swift Tarantella evoked the charm of Southern Italy. Coordination between Lark and Armstrong was particularly impressive during the thorny Gavotta con due Variazioni as well as the concluding Minuetto — Finale.

Moving from Europe to Latin America, Lark gave a passionate interpretation of Manuel Ponce's *Estrellita*, arranged by Jascha Heifetz, before offering up her own arrangement of *En la Orilla del Mundo* ("At the Edge of the World") by Cuban guitar master Martín Rojas. Bending pitches and discretely sliding into notes as well as adding an extended (written?) improvisation, Lark simply had fun.

Lark recently performed with the Juilliard Jazz Ensemble at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, and her astute understanding of jazz served her well during Ravel's jazz-inspired *Violin Sonata No. 2*. During each of the three movements, the duo played with rhythmic flexibility, creating an arc that allowed Ravel's musical lines to ebb and flow. The

violinist unleashed her inner jazz singer in the middle movement, Blues, ending with a sultry slide into the final chord.

Following intermission Lark and Armstrong, returned to the stage smiling and talking with one another, as they did throughout the afternoon. They clearly enjoy working together, which came through during their rollicking account of Bartók's *Romanian Folk Dances*.

Richard Strauss wrote his *Sonata for Violin and Piano in E-flat* at the age of 23. His only violin sonata, the work is transitional in the composer's oeuvre — he was moving away from classical chamber music toward symphonic tone poems. In the opening Allegro ma non troppo — fast but not too fast — the performers took Strauss at his word. From the long opening piano motif no phrase was rushed, allowing the music's passion to come through. Dramatic outbursts were full-bodied while lyrical moments were intimate. The beautiful Improvisation: Andante cantabile became a heartfelt song without words, its middle section crying out with love.

Beginning with a slow introduction in the piano, the Finale explodes into a series of long, episodic lines. An extended coda brings the work to an exciting conclusion. Lark and Armstrong gave an imposing performance that appropriately achieved symphonic proportions while also finding the movement's many introspective passages.

Acknowledging the audience's extended applause, Tessa Lark introduced the encore, her own arrangement of bluegrass tunes. "I'm sure you'll recognize them. You know the joke — if you've heard one bluegrass tune you've heard them both," she said. Lark is an accomplished bluegrass player, and only a native of Kentucky can get away with telling that joke. Taking off her shoes, Lark launched into the music, providing the audience with one more reason to go home happy.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com November 27, 2017.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)