

**Lauren Cauley & Mariel Roberts  
on Signature Series at LCCC (Sept. 26)**

by Nicholas Stevens



The black box theatre, the unassuming intimacy, the ineffable crackle of composers and instrumentalists sitting ten feet apart: a recent concert at Lorain County Community College looked and felt like a typical new music occasion. Yet its unceasing flow of solos and duos foreclosed any temptation to write the experience off

as just another contemporary show.

To describe violinist Lauren Cauley and cellist Mariel Roberts, the performers who captivated listeners in LCCC's Cirigliano Studio Theatre on Thursday, September 26, as "emerging" would be to conflate youth with artistic achievement — a mistake. Each boasts a dense bio, packed with names whose levels of fame these two will claim soon enough. On this occasion, they focused on the music of LCCC faculty composer Jeffrey Mumford, among other living modernists concerned with the tactile and sensuous qualities of instrumental sound.

Swoops and dives arced toward crystalline formations in the duo's reading of Richard Carrick's *Graphic Series #2*, a 2019 essay in icy tones for Cauley and star-bright harmonics for Roberts. The former quartet-mates reunited again at the end of the program, but in the meantime traded off as soloists.

Mumford's *eight musings...revisiting memories* afforded Cauley opportunities to explore timbres and gestures that still feel new on an instrument popular since the Renaissance. The first "musing" found sharp strokes morphing into dry tones, followed by impossible-seeming right-hand pizzicati. The third similarly challenged Cauley to convert an archipelago of gestures into a cohesive statement. The sixth gave the impression of freeing whatever voice had been struggling to speak the whole time.

In *Cara*, her own composition, Roberts treats fingerboard-spanning slides — which imitate seagull calls in the music of Crumb — as the basis of an entire piece. She demonstrated the potential of that motion so thoroughly and concisely that the piece could be included in an etude book of extended techniques. At one point, she created counterpoint just by gliding up and down in pitch.

Dai Fujikura's *Fluid Calligraphy* felt long, like one of Mumford's perfect musical cocktails diluted to pitcher proportions. Cauley brought out its best: sweet, bitter, and hard-to-place herbal notes. Mumford's *radiances spreading from a world of resonant stillness* offered both immediate contrast and a showcase for Roberts' remarkable low-end resonance and pizzicato sound.

Squeaks, squelches, whines, growls — some words can hint at the sounds that Cauley produced in service to Clara Ianotta's *Dead wasps in a jam-jar I*, but the best of them sound unfairly pejorative. The preparation of the violin with paperclips, a metal mute, and a thimble drew listeners in at first, but the actual music made possible by the setup soon overpowered any whiff of gimmickry. The performance was a program highlight.

Roberts treats the first of Saariaho's *Sept papillons* as a delicate, vulnerable thing — her bow angled high to achieve the lightest possible volume. The second butterfly fluttered by at a dizzying clip, and the third remained on a high branch, inscrutable. Roberts minimized the gnashing noise possible in the middle movement, and took its Bach-recalling arpeggios at the speed of a caterpillar's metamorphosis.

Mumford's *eight aspects of appreciation II*, in the duo's rendition, recalled familiar styles from music history: Renaissance counterpoint melted as if by acid rain, Classical-era domestic music run through a blender, the final movement of Mendelssohn's *Octet* on a rampage. Fierce precision reigned, the players' excellence uncompromised after a continuous hour. As Northeast Ohio's 21st-century music scene continues to mature, whisky-like in its blend of simple pleasures with bracing complexity, it will attract still more touring artists seeking collaboration with locals. The more concerts on this level of consistent quality that result, the better for us all.

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